



RANDY'S  
LOYALTY

By Amy Brooks





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Never was there a lovelier picture than Randy as she sat with her guitar, picking its strings. — *Page 7.*



The Randy Books

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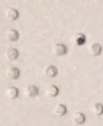
# RANDY'S LOYALTY

BY

AMY BROOKS

AUTHOR OF "THE RANDY BOOKS," "DOROTHY DAINTY SERIES,"  
"A JOLLY CAT TALE"

*WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY THE AUTHOR*

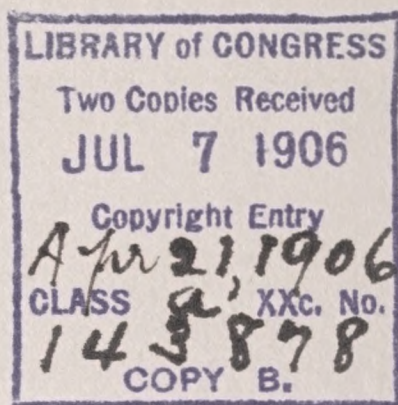


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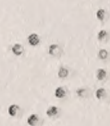
*Published, August, 1906*



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RANDY'S LOYALTY



NORWOOD PRESS  
BERWICK & SMITH CO.,  
NORWOOD, MASS.,  
U. S. A.



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# RANDY'S LOYALTY

## CHAPTER I

### RANDY

THE fresh breeze set the leaves dancing, swayed the hollyhocks, swung the long branches of the grapevine, and, pushing the leaves apart as with caressing fingers, let the tiny sunbeams through that they might dance upon the grass. It wafted the music of a guitar as if on wings until it seemed entrancing, so sweet, so tinkling were its cadences. One had not far to look for the source, and never was there a lovelier picture than Randy as she sat with her guitar, picking its strings the while she indulged in day dreams. She was her Aunt Miranda's namesake, and it was Aunt Miranda who had taught her to play.

"You look as I did, Randy, and as I used



to play the guitar, it would please me to teach you, and to see you picking the strings and making the sweet music which only the guitar can give."

Randy loved Aunt Miranda, and would have done anything which could give her pleasure, and she practiced persistently until she had acquired a fine touch and technique, and now the guitar was a dear companion. The wind blew the little soft-curling locks of her hair, and, for the moment, the guitar lay idly in her lap. She was thinking of beautiful Aunt Miranda. What a joy it had been to have her with them. When a young girl she had married Clement Carlton, and because of parental opposition to the match the young couple had left the village and in the glorious West had sought Fortune's favor. The goddess had given them more than they had ever dreamed of acquiring, and now they were to have a grand house-warming in the beautiful home which they had chosen.

Randy's lips parted in a sunny smile as



she thought of pleasant things which were being said of dear Aunt Miranda and her stalwart husband. She gave little thought to the fact that Jotham was to be her escort; if her attention had been called to the matter, Randy would have looked up with gentle surprise, and have wondered that anyone should have thought it worth mentioning. Had not Jotham Potts always been her faithful friend since they were children? Was he not always her escort at any of the village social events, unless it happened that Arthur Earnshaw or some other enterprising youth had shown amazing zeal in hastening to Randy in order that he might be the first to ask the pleasure of her company? Surely, a friendship of so long standing was not a matter for comment; it was an everyday affair, a matter of course.

Again she picked the strings, playing a merry little song in keeping with her mood. Soft footsteps were approaching; a little girl, whose pretty face was framed with an abundance of flaxen hair, came rapidly



along the path, advancing until she stood near Randy.

"Why, Janie McLeod! I never heard a footstep, never dreamed that anyone was near me until I saw you before me. You must be a fairy to flit over the ground so lightly."

The little girl laughed merrily. She loved Randy, and had stolen softly toward her to give her a surprise.

"I'm nae elfin," she said, "'though I've been trying some spells this morning. Sandy said tae me at daybreak: 'Fill your shoon wi' fern seed, an' whate'er you wish be, 'twill be granted.'"

"And did you?" Randy asked, her merry gray eyes showing her amusement.

"Indeed, an' truly," Janie earnestly replied; "an' there's mair in them than I can weel step wi'. I filled them to o'erflowin', an' Sandy laughed at me. 'Where will ye put yer foot, Janie?' he asked, an' in truth I had tae spill some oot before I could get my feet in the shoon. Well, ye need nae



laugh," she continued, "for I wished gude wishes, an' may they come tae pass."

"I wish it, too, Janie," Randy responded, at the same time drawing the little girl toward her.

"There's nae ane I'd sooner tell my wishes tae than tae yoursel', Randy, dear," said Janie, "an' sometime I will, but they must nae be tellit until they hae time tae come true. I hae wished something fine for a'most everyone in the village. Would the elves grant sae mony gude things, do you think?" she asked eagerly.

"I couldn't guess," Randy answered, "but tell me, Janie, did you wish for something for yourself?"

"That's the verra thing that Sandy asked me, an' truly I didna, for by the time I'd wished for a' the dear folks hereaboot, I'd forgotten mysel'."

"Oh, Janie, Janie! I hope the elves will remember you, you generous little friend, and give you something finer than you would have asked for yourself," said Randy.



"I hae my voice that the elves didna gie me; Ane higher than they blessed me wi' it," said Janie, reverently.

"And a blessing it is," said Randy, earnestly. "Think of the joy which your singing gives to your friends, and when you are older, the great public shall hear it and be delighted with its rare music."

"The music maester says it'll nae be a great while before I will be singing before crowded houses. Think o' the gudeness o' Sandy an' his gude wife tae gie me a hame an' the music lessons, too. I'll repay them wi' love; they hae nae need o' money."

"Your love is like sunshine in their home; they often say so," Randy replied.

As if a thought had suddenly occurred to her, the little lass turned, and regarded Randy.

"Did ye notice? I'm speakin' braw Scotch, and the music maester told me only yesterday that I *must* advance as quickly in my speech as in my music. I'll put my mind on it and say much, instead of muckle, and



home, instead of hame, and to, instead of tae. I *do* when I remember, and I *must* remember. Now play 'Bonny Prince Charlie,' and I'll sing it and say every word as I should."

The silvery tones of the guitar made a fine accompaniment, and Janie's marvelous voice rang out upon the air in the rollicking Scotch ballad. Then, as if for contrast, she sang bewitchingly that beautiful song, "Bid Me to Love." Randy, unfamiliar with the music, strummed an impromptu accompaniment. Sweetly Janie sang:

"I do not ask for the heart of thy heart  
I do not bid thee remain, or depart,  
Let me but love thee, and I will not plead,  
Aught save to follow where'er thou may'st lead."

Janie sang as if her heart were in the song, and one who listened clasped his rugged hands as he murmured, "Bless the bairnie."

The bushes parted and Sandy McLeod approached, his eyes bright and his cheeks



flushed with pleasure. "Aye, a fine pair o' songsters ye be, an' I here in time for the braw music. Ne'er did I hear music mair sweet, an' a' by luck, for a wee errand took me tae the Squire's, an' on my way I find mysel' i' the nick o' time for the bonny concert."

"We never dreamed that we had an audience," said Randy.

"An' ye doubtless sang a' the better for that." Sandy responded, "an' havin' had the pleasure, I'll be goin' on tae do the errand on which my Margaret hae sent me. She's in a great twitter o' excitement because o' the fine time in store for half the village at yer Aunt Miranda's." Randy and Janie accompanied the genial old Scotchman, and in the cheery sitting-room they joined the family and soon all were merrily talking of the anticipated event.

The Weston house was not the only house, however, in which the house-warming formed an interesting topic for conversation.



For weeks little else had been talked of, and no one was more intensely excited over her costume than good Mrs. Buffum. Blessed with a large family her hands rarely lacked a task to occupy them, yet on this sunny morning she sat at her kitchen window, gazing out upon the fields. No thought had she of the bread which was waiting to be kneaded, or of the basket of carefully sprinkled clothes over which no iron had passed.

“Wal, I declare! Ye look’s if ye was dreamin’. Ain’t ye got any jobs ter do this hot day? Ain’t it mejum hot fer this time er year? Why, ye don’t answer! Ye ain’t gittin’ deaf, be ye?”

Mrs. Hodgkins paused before the window and fanned herself vigorously with her apron.

“Come in, won’t ye?” asked Mrs. Buffum, and, without waiting to be urged, Mrs. Hodgkins entered, but not before Mrs. Buffum had hastily placed the bread-pan in the pantry, dusted a chair for her caller with



her soiled apron, and tossed the apron into the chopping-tray which stood upon the pantry shelf. She had *aimed* the apron at a drawer which stood open, which was the only probable reason why it landed in the tray.

“Ye look kind o’ flurried, don’t ye? Ye’ve seen me off’ n’ on these twenty years, so I shouldn’t think my comin’ in fer er minute would make ye narvous.”

Mrs. Hodgkins’s keen eyes had detected her neighbor’s flushed cheek, and knew that she had hurriedly hidden something before opening the door for her guest. She sat down in the proffered rocker, and her eyes roved about the room, intent upon spying anything unusual in the arrangement of furniture, or if any article generally in view were absent.

“Cur’ous what she hid,” she muttered.

“I didn’t hear what ye said,” said Mrs. Buffum.

“I’ll ask ye what ye’re talkin’ er wearin’ up ter Mis’ Miranda Carlton’s, come Tues-



day? ” Mrs. Hodgkins asked as if repeating a question.

“ Ye didn’t ask that afore.”

“ Wal, I do’no’s I did, but I’m askin’ it *naow*.” Mrs. Hodgkins retorted.

“ That’s what I was thinkin’ ’baout when ye came by the winder,” said Mrs. Buffum, “ an’s I’ve only two dresses ter choose from, it stan’s ter reason I’ll hev ter wear one er t’other.”

“ I call ye lucky.”

“ Why do ye say that? ”

“ What else could I say? ” demanded Mrs. Hodgkins; “ ye’ve two dresses to choose from; I’ve got one, so there ain’t much use for me ter set in my winder wonderin’ what I’ll wear. I’ll go to the house-warmin’ with my great Aunt Statiry’s green silk on, or I’ll hev ter go with no gaown on at all; but what’s yer second gaown, Mis’ Buffum? ” she paused to ask. “ I’ve seen ye with yer Cousin Keziah’s tea-colored silk; what’s yer other one? Was that what ye rushed ter put away ’fore lettin’ of me in? ”



“Good land, no!” exclaimed Mrs. Buf-fum; “I ain’t had the other dress daown ter look at fer years. I’ve had it put away in a old valise that was full er the smell er camfire, an’ I’m baound ter wear it ef I kin air the camfire out’n it. It’s er pooty gaown, blue with pink sprigs on it, an’ they do say that when Keziah wore it she cut er ’mazin’ figger, an’ I’ve set my mind on wearin’ it an’ cuttin’ ’nother figger on my own hook.”

“But I see yer Cousin Keziah jist ’baout the time she up an’ went ter New York State ter live, an’ that time she was some *thin*, not ter say *skinny*. Bein’s ye’re what most folks call mejum stout, I’m wonderin’ haow on airth ye’ll git it on.”

A light of triumph illuminated Mrs. Buf-fum’s eyes as she replied; “I’ve got that planned. I wondered, an’ wondered, an’ at the very minute ye stopped at the winder I’d arriv at a conclusion. I’ve got some silk, ter be sure it’s different color, but I sha’n’t let that stop me. I’ll rip the seams at the sides er the waist an’ put in er piece er the light-



braown silk. That'll make it big 'nough ter go 'raound me."

"Land o' Goshen! *Haow* it'll look!" exclaimed Mrs. Hodgkins, staring at her friend as if questioning the wisdom of wearing such a dress when another one was possible.

"Look!" Mrs. Buffum said, the one word spoken in fine disdain. "Look!" she repeated, "why, nobody'll see the braown silk piece put in under the arms. Thank goodness, I ain't one er them as is always gesticlatin' an' sawin' the air with my arms ter show what I mean when I talk. I kin say all I hev ter say in er way that folks'll understand 'thout flappin' my arms up an' daown like the wings of er goose ter give an extry whack ter my meanin'."

"Ye don't say!" exclaimed Mrs. Hodgkins, too greatly impressed to make further remark until a moment later, when she hastened to ask a question which suddenly suggested itself.

"Do ye feel *sure* ye kin keep yer arms



daown ter hide them pieces the hull evenin' 'thout liftin' of 'em by mistake? "

"Wal, I *guess* I kin. Sure's my name's Buffum, ye don't ketch me er liftin' my arms ef the roof's blown off with er bomb shell."

This was a strong statement, and Mrs. Hodgkins looked at her friend in admiration. She thought it foolish to wear a gown which called for the exercise of such control over one's movements, but she admired the firm will which could conceive and carry out such a novel plan for appearing in rich apparel. As she trudged along the road toward home, she continued to wonder if Mrs. Buffum's power of endurance would be equal to the strain. She was vaguely aware that while she did not actually wish that the good woman might display her peculiar makeshift, she could not help thinking it would be amusing if such a thing should happen.

"She couldn't eat with her elbows glued to her sides," she said to herself; then a gleeful light made her eyes twinkle.



“Ef at the spread, somebody’d jest offer her er cup er tea, she *hev* ter take it, fer she’s jest paowerful fond of it, an’ she couldn’t noways git er cup er tea ter her face ’thout er liftin’ of her arms. I *vaow*, Mis’ Buffum shall hev her tea if I hev ter hand it ter her myself. I don’t want ter be mean, but she’s declared that she kin spend the hull evening at the haouse-warmin’ an’ never once fer-git ter keep her arms daown, an’ I say she can’t; it can’t be did. Naow, ef I say I’d be tickled ter see her lift her elbows an’ show them pieces er light-braown silk sewed inter her blue-sprigged silk ter make the waist big ’nough ter go raound, I do’no’s I’m special mean. One thing I forgot to ask her, an’ that riles me some. The last time I seen that gaown, her Cousin Keziah was what ye might call er narrer figger, an’ her neck looked like er gridiron or er wire toaster, but Mis’ Buffum’s tremenjous fat, an’ I wonder ef she’s goin’ ter wear that low-necked gaown same’s Keziah did, er whether she’ll fill in the neck with some other kind



er silk. Land sakes! Ef she patches it under the arms an' raound the neck, it'll look like a patchwork bedquilt when she gits it on. An' anyway, I *do* wonder what she hid 'fore she opened the door fer me."

It was late in the forenoon when she knocked at the door of a little cottage and impatiently waited for admittance. She heard a door creak, then after a long pause someone who evidently wished to have her footsteps inaudible, tiptoed softly across the floor. Another pause, during which a curtain was drawn aside and then someone hurried to the door.

"Why, it's you!" exclaimed the hostess. "I thought ye was that pesky tin-peddler what always comes by here of a Tuesday. I waited ter peek 'fore lettin' of ye in; ef 't was him, I wasn't goin' ter the door. He stays an hour 'n a half whether ye buy er not, an' gin'rally asks fer er lunch. Last time he stopped he give me er tin dipper fer a ole gaown, a ole coat an' traowers, an' land knows haow many rags, an' when it



come ter lunch he *was* the beater-ee! He said his conscience wouldn't let him eat pie, an' his dyspepsy wouldn't let him eat doughnuts, an' fer some reason er other he didn't like ter eat bread, an' his religion wouldn't let him eat pork. I mus' say I was mad, an' I told him that I was sorry ter hev ter tell him that my *charity* wouldn't let me give him frosted cake."

"Wal, I swan!" ejaculated Mrs. Hodgkins, "I didn't know ye had so much spunk, Almiry. I didn't, truly, ef ye be my niece. One thing I'll tell ye, haowsomever; ef ye intend ter keep yer door shet, an' ye want ter sneak across the floor an' peek aout the winder 'fore lettin' folks in, ye'd better git some different boots, fer I heared every step ye took, an' knew ye was squintin' at me from a chink 'fore ye told me. Naow I've jest come from Mis' Buffum's, an' she's full er fixin' up er gaown ter show off in at the haouse-warmin', an' I guess she expects ter cut quite er figger."

Then followed a description of Mrs. Buf-



fum's plans for making the small waist conform to her ample figure.

"An' I had ter leave her haouse without hevin' faound aout what she hid 'fore openin' the door ter let me in. Don't ye call that provokin', Almiry?"

"Wal, yes, 'tis," agreed Mrs. Meeks; "but one thing I *do* know, she's got er bead necklace that she's tellin' all 'round b'longed ter her husband's first cousin's sister's husband's oldest daughter, and naow it b'longs ter her. She's goin' ter wear that because her gaown's goin' ter be low-necked. Ain't it scandalous fer the mother of nine children, five of 'em still ter home, ter wear er low-necked gaown?"

"I do'no'," Mrs. Hodgkins replied, with a puzzled air; "what's nine children got ter do with the neck of her gaown, Almiry?"

"Why, she'd oughter be less flighty; don't ye say so?"

"Flighty! Flighty!" Mrs. Hodgkins gasped, shaking with merriment. "Flighty! Land, but that's funny, an' her er weighin'



over two hundred, and jest the shape of er tub. Ye don't often make er joke, Almiry, but ye made one this time."

"She don't weigh no two hundred; why, *I* weigh er hundred, thin's *I* be, an' she wouldn't weigh over twice that heft," Mrs. Meeks replied.

Mrs. Hodgkins stopped laughing. "Almiry," she said, "ye weigh er hundred, an' yer as flat as er shad, an' ef Mis' Buffum weighs a aounce, she weighs two hundred an' ten at the least cal'lation."



## CHAPTER II

### A SUBJECT FOR GOSSIP

“I WISH ter goodness I could settle this 'ere question that's makin' me think on't from mornin' till night,” said Aunt Prudence Weston; “land knows there's 'nough ter think of an' ter do right here 'thout frettin' 'baout that 'ere little farm er mine.”

“I thought the man yer had ter run it was doin' fust-rate,” remarked Philury, the buxom lass who served as maid-of-all-work at the Weston farm.

“The man's doin' well 'nough, but his wife ain't wuth er row er pins, an' naow she's up an' writ that she's goin' ter visit some relatives er hern in Montryal, er some other place nigh there. She says she won't go till I've faound someone else ter come an' oversee the place, but haow'm I ter find



someone fer the sitiuation, whilst I'm here, an' the farm there? She says she'll stay till I'm good an' ready ter send someone ter take the place. I've 'most er mind ter take my time 'baout it."

Squire Weston, who had just entered the kitchen, laughed heartily at his sister's speech.

"That's right, Prudence, that's right," he said, "don't never pay ter be in too great er hurry."

Aunt Prudence Weston was a good woman, a valued member of her brother's family, a blunt, yet kind friend, and above all things a woman who could keep her own counsel. Judge then of her disgust when having told no one outside the Weston household of the problem which vexed her, she was soon made aware that the greater part of the village people knew all about it.

Early one morning Josiah Boyden, ex-selectman, and one of the solid townsmen, stopped at the door to advise Aunt Pru-



dence. She was placing a row of shining milk-pans in the sun, when Josiah drove up to the door.

"Haow be ye, Miss Prudence?" he asked.

"Quite well, thank ye," Aunt Prudence responded, adding in an undertone, "I do'-no' why ye want ter know."

"Thought I'd call as I was goin' by. I heared ye was some put aout 'baout yer farm hands, 'n' I thought I'd best advise ye, bein's I've allus had the handlin' er considerable reel 'state. Ye'd better git some reel cap'ble woman ter go right ter work on the place ter oncet. Ye couldn't tell what that man would do 'thout er good, smart woman ter run him."

"Is that why ye keep Statiry Hopkins over ter your haouse?" asked Aunt Prudence, her black eyes snapping in a manner that plainly showed her annoyance at his presumption. "They do say that she does just everlastin'ly make ye stand 'raound, and mebbe ye need it."

Josiah winced. He was stingy, and Sta-



tiry was willing to work for less money than any other woman whom he had ever employed; therefore he kept her and endured her impudence.

“No 'fense, Miss Prudence,” he ventured; “I didn’t know but ye’d value er little advice.”

“I *do*, fer what it’s *wuth*,” Aunt Prudence replied, and as there seemed to be nothing further to say, Josiah Boyden gathered up the reins and drove down the road. On the way to the Centre he saw Mrs. Hodgkins trotting along at a rapid pace. He knew, as did everyone for miles around, that no such tireless newsgatherer ever existed as Mrs. Hodgkins. He was angry that Aunt Prudence had not promptly accepted his advice. He considered himself to be by far the most prominent and influential man in the town, and it was past his comprehension that anyone could refuse his counsel if he condescended to give it. He had wished that in some way he could further annoy Aunt Prudence, thus to punish her for ignoring



his valuable advice. Here was his opportunity, and he grasped it.

"Mis' Hodgkins!" he shouted, at the same time giving such a vigorous tug at the reins that the startled equine reared, and seemed about to bolt, then, thinking better of it, came down to earth again, and assumed her usual sleepy pose.

"Fer goodness' sake, Josiah! What be ye tryin' ter do with that hoss? Was ye hollerin' ter me fer help, because I don't no-ways think that critter'd ever think er runnin' away, 'tho' I will say she looked kind er fearsome with her mouth wide open when ye yanked the reins. Actooally, I jumped one side for fear she'd shet them teeth on me. Ye'd oughtn't ter try ter make her do monkey tricks, an' you er dignified cit'zen, so ter speak."

"Stop, will ye?" shouted Josiah. "Ye almost made me fergit what I was goin' ter say."

Mrs. Hodgkins's speech had exasperated him. He would have denied her the pleas-



ure of hearing the bit of news which he had to tell, but he was yet more provoked with Aunt Prudence and also determined to get even; so, apparently ignoring what Mrs. Hodgkins had said, he leaned from the wagon to say:

“Ef ye’ve any cur’os’ty, ye’d better go up ter Squire Weston’s an’ advise Aunt Prudence ter git someone ter run her farm. Some good, smart woman, fer they do say that the man she’s got is doin’ well ’nough with the craps, but the farmhouse is jest bein’ sp’iled by lack er proper scrubbin’ an’ sich. I’d go up there ’f I was you.”

Mrs. Hodgkins needed no urging. She hardly answered Josiah, so eager was she to lose no time in learning all the particulars regarding the question which vexed Aunt Prudence. As she hurried along she pondered as to the best manner of questioning: if it would be wise to come directly to the point, or if a roundabout method would elicit a more satisfactory answer. She decided upon the latter course.



Aunt Prudence had been known to flatly refuse to answer the questioning of inquisitive neighbors. Mrs. Hodgkins determined to use every artifice to win from her a full and complete explanation of the difficulty which confronted her. As she approached the house, she saw that the door was wide open, and she paused before entering to listen and learn if anything of interest was being discussed.

She could hear a quick footstep, and the rustle of a starched dress. That must be Aunt Prudence Weston, and the rattling of pans told that Philury was at work in the pantry.

"They ain't speakin' a word," whispered Mrs. Hodgkins; "I wonder ef they've had er spat? I guess I'll go right in; p'raps it'll be interestin'."

Without pausing to knock, she entered, and was somewhat disappointed when Aunt Prudence turned a smiling face to greet her.

"Haow d'ye do, Mis' Hodgkins? Come



'n' take er cheer by the winder. Ye look warm; did ye hurry? "

Mrs. Hodgkins's cheek flushed to a ruddier tint. The kindly greeting made her hope that none of the household had seen her as she had stood listening at the door.

"I did come up the hill pooty quick fer me," she replied, "but I'll ketch my breath in a minute."

Aunt Prudence offered her a fan and sat peering through her spectacles as if waiting to learn the purport of her call.

Mrs. Hodgkins fidgeted upon her chair. She wished that Aunt Prudence's eyes were not quite so penetrating.

"Ye don't set comf'table," said Aunt Prudence, "that 'ere cheer leans back some. Lemme put this here behind ye ter brace ye up," and without waiting for her caller to accept it, she vigorously pushed a plump cushion between the chairback and Mrs. Hodgkins's shoulders; then as if having done the right thing at the right time, she



leaned back in her own chair and again scrutinized her caller. She did not ask why she had called, but her eyes were as questioning as interrogation points. Mrs. Hodgkins was wild to commence her inquiries, but at loss to know how to begin. She had expected to find Aunt Prudence bustling about the kitchen, busy with household tasks which could not well be set aside. She had intended to ask a few preliminary questions, and thus cautiously approach the subject which piqued her curiosity. She was wondering how to broach the subject when Aunt Prudence, well knowing that some interesting errand had hurried Mrs. Hodgkins up the hill, leaned forward and abruptly asked:

“Did ye come fer anything special?”

“Wal, yes, that is—wal, naow, I’ll tell ye; I heared ye was some riled ’baout yer farm, an’ I thought p’raps er leetle friendly advice——”

“That’ll *do*,” said Aunt Prudence, “ye needn’t bother ter ’dvice me; I’ve had con-



sid'able offered me so fur, an' I guess I kin git 'long 'thout any more."

Mrs. Hodgkins was disappointed. She had hoped to hear all the details of the dilemma, how much Aunt Prudence was willing to pay for help, and what she would probably *have* to pay; if she had yet chosen a woman for the place, and any other little points which might be gleaned by careful questioning. As it was, she had had her long tramp up the hill for nothing. She arose to go; she did not remember of ever having felt so completely abashed. A giggle from the pantry added to her discomfort; she could accuse no one, because she could not say who had laughed, but she was quite sure that it was Philury, the irrepressible.

As she hurried down the path and along the road, she could not have said with whom she felt most displeased: Josiah Boyden, who had sent her upon a useless errand, or Aunt Prudence, who had not appreciated her interest.

"Mistaken it for common cur'os'ty," she



muttered as she turned into the lane. She did not realize that the lane led her past the land which lay behind Josiah Boyden's farm, nor did she see the figure which, leaning upon the fence, was intently watching her as she trudged along.

"Been up ter the Squire's?" he asked in a peculiarly hectoring tone.

"Wal, good land, Josiah! Hev I got ter meet ye all parts er the day?" exclaimed the exasperated woman, stopping squarely before him in the middle of the lane.

"Ef ye keep on circ'latin' raound like ye hev so fur, ye'll likely meet some er the critters ye seen when ye fust started aout," Josiah replied.

"I wouldn't 'a' called ye a *critter*, though I think the name fits," snapped Mrs. Hodgkins, as she turned down the lane.

"Haow much did ye find aout up ter the Squire's?" called Josiah, with a chuckle.

"I'll leave ye ter guess," Mrs. Hodgkins replied, never turning her head to look at him. She would not tell him that she had



learned nothing, and Josiah Boyden wished that he had refrained from taunting her; he believed that she had gained some points of information, and because she was angry with him, withheld them.

“’Tarnal hard to know haow to work er woman. I give her the hint ter go up there, an’ naow her mouth, that’s allus wide open, is shet tighter’n er clamshell,” he muttered, while Mrs. Hodgkins, resorting to her habitual custom of talking to herself, remarked:

“When he finds aout that I didn’t git er word ter pay me fer stalkin’ up that hill, I hope he’ll enjoy it.”

“Been up ter Squire Weston’s?”

Mrs. Hodgkins paused and stared about her to learn whence came the question.

“Oh, there ye be!” she exclaimed, as a smiling face peeped between the bushes, “seems ’s if this ’ere little lane was plumb full er pussons. Where d’ ye spring from, Almiry?”

“Been aout ter do er few arrants, an’ stopped ter talk with Statiry Hopkins, an’



she said Josiah said ye'd been up ter Squire Weston's."

"Wal, I hev, an' brung away as much as I took there, which was nothin' 't all. I tell ye, Almiry, as sure's you're my niece, it's consid'able discouragin' ter run half over the taown fer er stray piece er news an' not get so much as ye could lay er finger on."

Almira Meeks was as eager for news as her aunt, but the expression of disgust sat so comically upon Mrs. Hodgkins's usually jolly face that it was a task for Almira to refrain from laughing.

Mrs. Hodgkins continued to discourse upon the scarcity of news and the stinginess which caused those who had a bit to withhold it.

"I mus' say, I don't think much er people that don't never hev no news from one year's end ter 'nother, but I wouldn't keer ter mention what I think er folks as has news an' won't tell it. Why, Almiry, ye ain't spoke sence ye started ter walk daown this



'ere lane with me. Ain't ye got er word ter say? "

She turned and peered into the face of the younger woman; then she came to a full stop.

"Fer goodness' sakes, Almiry, ye ain't laughin', be ye? "

Almira assured her that she had no idea of laughing. Her eyes were twinkling and Mrs. Hodgkins believed that she was amused, but as she had insisted that she was not laughing, there seemed to be nothing to do but to accept her statement.

Mrs. Hodgkins was annoyed; Aunt Prudence was exasperated. A few moments after Mrs. Hodgkins had left, Mrs. Buffum arrived in a state of great excitement. She puffed up the path and in at the door like an engine running at high speed.

"Here I be, an' I've come ter talk ter ye, but I'm clean tuckered aout, an' I'll hev ter wait till I've ketched my wind. I declare, it seems 's if ye lived on the top end er creation when I stand at the foot er the hill an'



think the hull stretch has got to be clumb afore I kin git within hailin' distance of ye; but there, likely 'nough ye wonder haow I kin like ter live daown in the holler, an' I don't. What with tryin' ter fight ants by daytime, an' skeeters at night; what with tryin' ter keep Tommy an' Johnny an' Sophy from gittin' draownded in the millpond, an' at the same time keepin' an eye on Hitty an' Ann, I'm well nigh bein' s' full er tasks as I ought ter be. The measles has broke aout in the haouse next ter us, an' 'though there's a mile an' a half between us, I can't help feelin' some narvous. Ole Mrs. What-yer-call-her, I never kin remember names, keeps er trottin' over ter aour haouse ter borry er drawin' er tea, or er half er cup er m'lasses, an' every time I tell her she'll bring them ere measles in her clothes, but she don't pay no 'tention ter what I say, an' keeps on comin' just the same. Only yest'day I told her to keep away for a while, an' I *vaow*, 'fore I was up this mornin' she come paoundin' on my back door. I poked my head aout the



winder an' says I: 'Good land, is that you ag'in?' I said it reel tart like, but she didn't mind. 'Do I look much like anybody else?' says she. I was mad, but what could I do? Says I, 'What do ye want?' 'Not much *this* time,' says she, 'though I'll call later in the day ef I want anything else. Jest naow I'll be pleased ef ye'll give me a quarter of er cup er vin'gar, an' a quarter of er cup er m'lasses, an' I jist lieve have 'em in the same cup bein's I'm goin' ter use 'em together.' Wal, I got a few clothes on an' went daown stairs; I got the vin'gar an' the m'lasses poured inter the cup when she 'baout took my breath away by sayin' that while I was 'baout it, I might make it er half er cup of each. She said she'd resk walking a mile an' er half without spillin' it. Did you ever see the beat er that? But haow I do run on; I almost forgot what I come fur. I thought, busy as I was, I'd drap ev'rything an' run up the hill ter tell ye that 'f I was you, I wouldn't wait er minute, er sleep er wink till I'd got that 'ere



farm er yourn took keer of by er smart woman. Don't ye think ye're er leetle too easy 'baout it, er settin' here whilst the farm's there? "

"Wal, I don't see my way clear ter bring the farm here," Aunt Prudence replied.

Mrs. Buffum, slow of comprehension, stood in amazement for a moment; then she slowly said:

"Ye wouldn't likely try ter bring it here, fer it couldn't be did." She evidently believed that she had made a brilliant speech.

"Advice," said Aunt Prudence, "is er reel handy thing fer them as don't know their own minds. Fer my part, I kin git 'long without it;" and it dawned upon Mrs. Buffum that further offers of counsel would be superfluous.

"I needn't er drapped my work ef I'd er known ye didn't need no advice," she said; "forceful as ye be, I didn't know but a word er so might help ye."

"I thank ye fer meanin' well," Aunt Prudence replied, "but the hull taown a-tryin'



ter tell me what ter do is makin' me er *leetle* tired."

When Mrs. Buffum had trudged away Philury could be silent no longer.

"I declare, I b'lieve I'll hev ter contrive ter help ye," she said, "by axin' ev'ry pusson what comes ter the door ef they're ped-dlin' advice; ef they be, I'll tell 'em ter try the next haouse."



## CHAPTER III

### HOUSE-WARMING

CLEMENT CARLTON and his lovely wife had been popular in the early days of their married life, when their boundless love for each other was their only valuable possession. To be sure, they had considered that priceless, but now, with their love made stronger by the years of companionship and accumulated wealth which made it possible for them to gratify every whim, and to dispense hospitality, they were indeed a couple to be envied.

So thought Clement and Miranda, and so thought their friends as they hastened toward the new home, to the long anticipated house-warming.

Along the roads, vehicles of every description could be seen; some filled with young people who laughed and talked of the even-



ing's gayety of which they would form a part, others with older people who told tales of the early days of the village, commencing their reminiscences with, "Why, I remember when——," and yet other teams whose occupants gossiped of the vast sums which Clement Carlton was expending, and mildly wondering if he was "cal-latin' how fast he's a-spendin' of it."

The house was originally a farmhouse, but it had been modernized; additions having been made which gave beauty here, and added comfort there, until it looked like quite another place, and seemed a palace to the village people.

The guests had been bidden to arrive at eight, and as no one had the least idea of being late, the rooms when the hands of the clock pointed to a quarter past the hour were as full as comfort would permit, and many walked about the grounds and upon the spacious piazza.

It was a delightfully informal gathering. There was no line of finely dressed ladies



assisting Mrs. Carlton to receive; instead, the hostess and her husband moved about among their friends, saying a kindly word of greeting to one, or chatting gayly with another; thus all felt warmly welcome, and congratulations were freely offered.

The assembly was evidently wearing its very best, and some there were who would have felt far more comfortable in their everyday clothing.

"I hate this 'ere stiff collar, but Mis' Small would make me wear it," confessed Mr. Small, to which his friend replied:

"I know just haow you feel, fur I got inter this 'ere white weskit, an' my wife she buttoned of it up. I told her 'twas too tight, but she wouldn't stop till the last 'tarnal button was buttoned. Land! But I ain't drawed a hull breath sence. What makes women folks so sot on havin' us stylish that they forgit we've got feelin's?"

Mr. Small ignored the question. Perhaps he thought it difficult to answer, and after a pause remarked:



“Goin’ to be a monstrous big spread in the dinin’-room, they tell me.”

“Much good I’ll git out’n it,” wailed he of the tight vest. “I couldn’t swaller a bite er sup onless my wife’d lemme undo this weskit, an’ she won’t.”

Of all her guests, Mrs. Carlton was sure that Randy, her namesake, was the fairest, and truly Randy was good to look upon. Her gray eyes were so merry, her cheeks so softly pink, and the curling ends of her hair so bright that those who looked at her turned as she passed, to look again, and Jotham, more keenly appreciative than his neighbors, saw all her charms, and marveled at her beauty.

Sweet and lovely she had ever been, yet to-night it seemed to him that she was fairer than she had ever been before. He watched her as she greeted her friends, and felt that all which he could ever win would be but a trifling gift to one day offer to this girl who had been his little playmate, his schoolmate, and his friend.



"How Jotham sticks ter Randy Weston like a burr," remarked Jemima Babson, to which her sister Belinda, with her customary sweetness, responded:

"'Tain't news yer tellin', Jemimy."

"I've 'baout decided that Jotham Potts is gittin' ter be er han'some young chap," said Joel Simpkins. Joel considered his opinion priceless.

"I ain't been Silas Barnes's head clerk these nine years fer nothin'," he continued, "an' I've learned ter keep my ears open when news is goin' raound, an' I've heard, 'tho' of course I do'no's it's so, that he's got a uncle what's some likely ter leave him er fort'n, an' naow I'm wild ter know ef it's so."

"Wal, Joel, why don't you ax him?" queried his friend.

"Oh, I ain't goin' ter hev Jotham think I'm cur'us," Joel replied. "Mebbe it's only one er them yarns what's forever bein' circ'lated raound taown, but all the same I'd like ter know."

"What with him bein' eddicated an' the



chance er gettin' er fort'n' ye mightn't be able ter speak ter him, that is, not real nigh."

"Naow that shows ye're a newcomer, an' don't know Jotham Potts. I'll tell ye, ef Jotham gits the hull creation he'll be the same Jotham we've knowed all these years. He's the young feller ye can trust, an' he's er friend worth havin'."

"Kind er 'nthusiastic, ain't ye?" questioned the doubtful one, with an air, however, of being willing to be convinced.

"No, I ain't; that is, not foolishly so. Him an' me's been 'quainted sence he was er little feller an' I was er fair-sized boy, an' I say all I said is just so, an' Randy's as fine er gal as he is a likely young man."

"Wal, bein' a newcomer in the village, I don't 'spose my 'pinion's val'able, but I will say I'm some took with that pooty gal's 'pearance. What d' ye call her—Randy, was it?"

"I call her Randy 'cause ev'ry one does; her name's *Mirandy*, M-i-r-a-n-d-a; named fer Mis' Carlton, what's her aunt."



"Land o' liberty! Who's that 'ere?"

"Who? Where?" asked Joel, staring about to see the cause of such great surprise.

"That woman there, with that flowered gaown onto her."

Joel looked; but one word escaped his lips.

"Jimminy!" he gasped.

"Wal, *that* ain't her name," was the disgusted response.

"Her *name's* Mis' Buffum, but that 'ere gaown so took me off'n my feet that I 'most forgot she had er name. Ain't she gotten up, tho'?"

"I never see er woman what felt so uncommon pleased with her clothes, an' her own self, tho' she's what ye call mejum plain."

"'Twouldn't do ter tell her that," chuckled Joel, to which his companion responded:

"I ain't er goin' ter."

It was quite true that Mrs. Buffum was proud of what she considered the extreme elegance of her costume. She had arranged





“Land o’ liberty! Who’s that ’ere?” — *Page 50.*







her hair with a view to its becomingness, had donned the flowered silk, clasped the bead necklace around her throat, and the reflection in the glass had made her eyes sparkle.

The Buffum children, large and small, had been dazzled by their mother's unusually showy apparel. The eldest girl thought it very tiresome to be forced to stay at home to maintain discipline, while the younger children expressed their displeasure in terms which, if unheeded, could not be misunderstood.

"Sophy, d'ye keep good order whilst I'm at the haouse-warmin', an' I'll let ye go with me when I call on the parson's wife next week."

"Johnny, an' Tommy, an' Hitty, an' Ann! Behave like good children, an' ye shall have m'lasses on both sides of yer bread ter-morrer noon."

The promised share in the call which her mother was to make seemed an especial honor to Sophy; surely she was now placed



above the level of her small brothers and sisters, while the unlimited luxury promised the smaller children caused them to feel as if they had been suddenly granted seats at the table of affluence.

"Molasses on *both* sides of our bread," whispered Hitty. "I don't b'lieve Mis' Carlton will give the folks much nicer'n that!"

"Pshaw!" Johnny replied. "Don't ye know they'll git rolls an' ham, an' cake an' pie, an' tarts, same's we hed at the yaller tea? That time I eat all I could, an' stuffed some more in my blaouse an' pants pockets. When I got home I caounted up, an' besides what I eat I had ten tarts, four pieces er cake an' er piece er pie. The pie got squashed, but them other things was all right."

"I don't care, 'twas just horrid ter take them things," said Hitty.

"*Was* it? Wal, I noticed ye eat what I gave yer, and ye wanted some er Tommy's share, but ye didn't git it."



Hitty insisted that she was quite contented with the treat which Mrs. Buffum had promised. It was not that she was so much sweeter than her sturdy brother Johnny, but Johnny had said that *nothing* could equal the spread that Mrs. Carlton would serve, so for the extreme pleasure of being on the opposite side, Hitty at once declared a yearning for molasses.

There were others who watched Mrs. Buffum as she swept through the rooms, and their comments were as varied as they were amusing.

“Mis’ Buffum’s er reel good woman, an’ I like her, but I tell ye, she thinks herself some punkins, don’t she?” remarked a motherly-looking woman, to which her friend replied:

“Wal, yes, I guess she does. She’s actin’ kind er queer, seems ter me. D’ye notice she holds her head turrible high, an’ ye’d think her arms were glued daown; she don’t lift ’em even ter use that ’ere fan she’s carryin’.”



"Mebbe she isn't warm 'nough ter need fannin'."

"Wal, I declare! That was er bright thing ter say, and her face the color of er biled lobster! She's meltin like er taller candle, but for some reason she won't fan herself; she's comin' this way, an' I'm goin' to ax her why."

"My gracious! That'd take courage," was the startled reply.

"Did anybody ever say I was timid?" came the sharp retort. There was no time to answer, for at that moment Mrs. Buffum, smiling and radiant, swept toward them.

"Good ev'n'," she said; "ain't it er fine night fer Mis' Carlton?"

"Fine night fer everybody," said the stout matron; "fine night, but some hot. Land sakes, Mis' Buffum, why don't ye wield yer fan? Ye look uncommon warm."

Mrs. Buffum's round face assumed a ruddier hue.



“I don’t never think fannin’ does much good when ye’re warm ’nough ’thout any extry exertion,” she said.

“Still, as ye’ve brung that ’ere fan ye might as well use it.”

“When I’m ter hum I allus hev er broom, er dus’ pan, er rollin’ pin in my hand; I’d feel turrible queer without somethin’ ter hold, so I brung this fan along.”

She turned from them abruptly and was at once confronted by Mrs. Hodgkins. She had thus far answered their questions glibly, and had left them that they might not continue to quiz. Here, at the first turn, was the woman who knew the plan by which her gown had been made large enough to cover her, and could, if she chose, tell everyone why, on a hot evening, her fan was not vigorously wielded.

Mrs. Hodgkins’s round face wore a jovial expression. She was glad to be one of the gay company, but she was *wildly* glad to see Mrs. Buffum.

“Hev ye kept yer elbows daown jest as



they be naow every minute sence ye arriv?" she asked, in a loud whisper.

"Sh——h! Certain I hev," replied Mrs. Buffum. "Didn't I *say* I should?"

"Good gracious, yes; but I didn't b'lieve ye could." Then a bright thought occurred to Mrs. Hodgkins.

"Has anybody offered ye er cup er tea?" she asked.

"Tea!" exclaimed Mrs. Buffum, a note of triumph in her voice. "Tea! As many as er dozen cups er tea has been offered me, an' I ain't took one on 'em. What d'ye think er that?"

Mrs. Hodgkins's face was a study, for mingled with its evident surprise and admiration was a fixed determination. A resolute will had Mrs. Hodgkins, and while she listened to all that her friend had to say, she was revolving in her mind several plans which might, if carried out, induce Mrs. Buffum to lift her plump arms and show those inserted pieces of light-brown silk.

She was usually kind-hearted, but her



jealousy had been aroused. Mrs. Buffum's showy dress was attracting a deal of attention, and the good woman was assuming a manner which she considered regal. They were of equal height, yet so high did Mrs. Buffum carry her head, at such an angle did she elevate her pudgy nose, that Mrs. Hodgkins felt herself looked down upon, and she was indignant.

"'F my gaown is a old one, it ain't pieced aout ter make it big 'nough ter git inter," she whispered, as Mrs. Buffum turned from her to find more congenial friends.

She saw Joel Simpkins and his wife, and hastened to join them. She had always liked Mrs. Simpkins from the time when, as Janie Clifton, she had been the village milliner and dressmaker, to the present day, when, as the wife of Joel and sister-in-law to Timotheus, she occupied a prominent place in the parish.

A bright smile curved the little dressmaker's lips as she offered her hand to her friend.



"Glad to see you, Mis' Buffum," she said; an' that's er han'some gaown ye're wearin'; becomes yer, too."

"Thank yer; I'm 'mazin' glad ye like it," was the grateful reply.

It was truly delightful to meet one who was not bent upon questioning, she thought, but Janie Simpkins's next remark filled Mrs. Buffum with wrath.

"My 'pinion as er dressmaker is wuth somethin', an' I sh'd say that was er pretty good fittin' gaown. I allus say that er waist orter fit fine on the side pieces ter make er correct fit. Just lift yer arms, Mrs. Buffum, so's I can tell ef it fits on the sides as good as it does front an' back."

In answer, Mrs. Buffum held her plump arms closer, while she spoke never a word, for the very good reason that she could not think what to say.

"I guess ye didn't hear what I said, Mis' Buffum," Mrs. Simpkins said, while she stared in surprise at the irate woman, who returned her gaze with eyes which plainly bespoke displeasure.



“ I heard what ye said, but I don’t hev ter do as ye axed me ter, ef I don’t see fit,” Mrs. Buffum said; “ an’ as my arms is all right where they be, there’s no call fer me ter lift ’em.”

“ Wal, I snum!” ejaculated Mrs. Simpkins, while Mrs. Buffum, as she sailed toward another group of friends, wondered if the admiration which her gown had won was sufficient compensation for the strenuous effort required to keep her arms in their enforced position, and to successfully parry the questioning of inquisitive friends.

Beside Aunt Miranda stood Randy, for the moment in earnest conversation, and many were the admiring glances which rested upon the young girl in her fresh beauty, and upon Miranda Carlton in her riper loveliness. Which was the more charming it were difficult to say, and Sandy McLeod having asked his good wife the question, received an answer which bespoke the opinion of all who looked upon them.

“ Weel, Sandy,” Margaret had replied, “ they’re rare blossoms, the twa, an’ it’s just



fer us tae decide which is the finer: a bud er a bloom. By lookin' at sweet Miranda Carlton we see wha' dear Randy'll be like."

"Right, Margaret, right," Sandy replied, "an' could we wish a finer thing than that Randy's braw beauty might ripen tae the richness o' the charm o' Clement Carlton's young wife?"

And what a delightful evening it was for Randy! With everyone so truly glad to meet her, her own greetings were offered with even more than her habitual cheeriness, and Jotham, her faithful cavalier, watched her with sparkling eyes, believing that there had never been a girl so fair.

There was one who watched Randy with as true admiration as anyone there, but her eyes were wistful, and she stood apart, taking no part in the merriment, seeming unmindful of aught save Randy. It was Eunice Earnshaw, and her effort to answer cheerfully when some friend addressed her showed plainly that something marred, for her, the evening's pleasure.



“If Arthur were only here,” she whispered, for in her love for her brother she believed that no one, not even Randy, could resist his charm, if only he were present to offer her the attention which now Jotham lavished upon her with undisputed sway. Arthur Earnshaw’s delight in Randy’s company had been very evident, and he had had bright dreams of superseding Jotham, believing that only persistent effort to gain her approval were necessary to win the coveted prize.

Now absent from the village upon business which could not be neglected, he chafed that Jotham should hold the field with no one to interfere. In truth, both Eunice and Arthur were taking the matter too seriously. Randy was not thinking of either Jotham or Arthur in any light other than as two kind and charming friends. She was glad that Jotham was with her, and sorry that Arthur was away, and looking at it thus lightly she did not guess the reason for Eunice’s pensive eyes, or her apparent lack of interest in the



games which others were enjoying, and of which she had always been so fond.

"Just see how grieved Eunice is to-night; she cares for nothing which Arthur cannot enjoy with her," Randy said.

Jotham looked at the sweet face in which solicitude for Eunice was so evident. He knew, as did many another, that while Eunice missed her brother's companionship, anxiety for his welfare as Randy's friend was the feeling now uppermost in her heart. He made no comment as to Eunice's manner, for just at that moment Randy's little sister Prue ran toward them and claimed their immediate attention.

She was greatly excited, and could not refrain from clapping her hands as she made her announcement.

"Oh, Jotham, Randy!" she cried. "What d'you 'spose? Aunt Miranda has got a big frosted cake on the center of the table with candy roses on top an' all 'round it, an' let's me 'n' you 'n' Jotham all sit 'side of each other when we go out to supper."



"I'll agree to sit 'side of each other,'" said Jotham, giving one of Prue's curls a little tweak.

"Now, Jotham Potts! You just needn't tease, for you know what I mean. Of course Randy wants to sit 'side of you, an' *I'm* just wild to."

"Now, that is what I call a frank compliment," said Jotham, "and one which I appreciate. See here, Prue! If we find ourselves crowded for room at the spread, I promise you that you shall sit near me if I have to take you on my knee."

"Yes, oh, yes!" Prue responded; "I wouldn't even care for frosted cake if you weren't there 'side o' me."

"May I always possess as loyal a friend," Jotham said; and while his dark eyes were merry, there was a serious note in his voice.

Randy looked again toward where Eunice was standing, and was about to speak to her, with a hope of cheering her, when two girls, evidently new acquaintances, joined Eunice and with her went out on the piazza.



## CHAPTER IV

### A LITTLE CULPRIT

WHILE Randy and Jotham were enjoying the society of their friends, while mirth and merry music were making the moments fly, while beneath the unwavering scrutiny of Mrs. Hodgkins's sharp eyes Mrs. Buffum gayly disported herself in her precious sprigged silk, while at the Carlton house all was light and gayety, a daring scheme was being concocted by which two uninvited guests hoped to be sharers in the festivities.

The moon, appearing from behind a cloud, revealed a small figure which stood gazing eagerly up toward the chamber window of a little farmhouse. He was evidently impatient, for he shifted his weight from one foot to the other, and at last, after repeated whistling which failed to elicit a response, an exclamation of disgust escaped his lips.



“Gee! Ain’t he stupid!” he said. He puckered his lips for another shrill whistle, making it longer and louder than before; but he whom he sought could not be easily aroused from his slumbers.

He picked up a tiny pebble and sent it flying toward the window. It struck the glass with a sharp click, which seemed startling because of the stillness of the night.

Disgusted because his efforts met with no response, the boy stooped, and grasping a handful of small pebbles, flung them upward toward the window, and a moment later a frowzy head looked out to see who had caused the disturbance.

“Who’s that?” cautiously whispered he of the hay-colored locks.

“Me,” was the lucid answer, which, brief though it was, served its purpose, for he was immediately recognized.

“Oh, Hi; what yer want?”

“Want yer ter come daown naow, Johnny, an’ I’ll tell yer somethin’ gret!”



The yellow head disappeared from the window, and soon the creaking of a rusty bolt was followed by the opening of the door, a flood of moonlight showing that the small boy had made a hasty toilet, having donned only his cotton blouse and trousers.

"What yer want?" he asked, his bright eyes showing that he was keenly interested in any proposition which Hi might make.

"Come aout an' I'll tell ye; shet the door," commanded Hi; "I don't want the others ter hear what we're up to. Shet that door," he repeated, "an' we'll stand over there behind them layloc bushes."

Johnny softly closed the door, as usual obeying Hi, who was ever a ruling factor, and when they had reached the sheltering lilac bushes, where prying eyes at other windows might not see them, Hi commenced to work the impressionable Johnny to a proper pitch of excitement.

"'S yer ma at Mis' Carlton's house-warmin'," he asked.



Johnny nodded. He considered it a foolish question, but dared not say so. Was there a grown person in the village who was *not* there? It was the children who had been deprived of a share in the lavish entertainment. Johnny felt aggrieved. Prue was there, and he was not; what mattered it that Prue was a niece of Mrs. Carlton? It was but the more aggravating that he was not a nephew.

"Where's yer pa?" was the next question.

"Is he up ter Mis' Carlton's, too?"

"He's gone over ter North Village, an' he's comin' back ter-morrer."

"Then he won't ketch us talkin' here."

"No, he *won't*," Johnny said, impatiently.

"An' is that what yer called down ter tell me?"

Hi chose to take no notice of his chum's displeasure; he knew that Johnny's stock of courage was small, and careful work would be necessary to whet his bit of bravery.

"It's just er shame fer yer ter be made



ter stay home an' go ter bed, an' all the folks up there er havin' ice cream an' all the other goodies. I'd think ye'd be mad; I be," said Hi, his voice expressing reproach.

"*Ain't* I mad? But what be I goin' ter do 'baout it?" snarled Johnny.

He had been sound asleep when Hi had flung the gravel at his window. What was the pleasure of being awakened in order to hear an inventory of the joys of which he was not partaking. Very slowly and clearly Hi made his next remark.

"They ain't goin' ter hev their 'freshments till *quarter ter ten*," he said.

"Spos'n' they ain't!" said Johnny, convinced that he would far better have stayed in bed than to have been made to listen to such pointless remarks.

"Spos'n' they *ain't*!" repeated Hi, in fine scorn; "wal, it's only 'baout quarter ter *nine* naow, an' I intend ter git there in time ter hev some er the treat, that is, if ye've got the spunk ter help me, but I don't b'lieve ye hev."



“I’d do anything ter help yer ef I could git some er the treat, but I don’t see haow we could do it; they wouldn’t let us in,” said Johnny, doubting, yet hoping that Hi possessed a plan which might succeed.

“Haow ye goin’ ter do it? Haow kin I help ye, Hi?” he asked, but Hi thought best to keep his scheme secret until he was ready to use it.

“Come ’long over with me,” he said, “an’ when we git there I’ll tell yer what ter do.”

Johnny Buffum had had many experiences wherein Hi Babson had played a conspicuous part, and for a moment he hesitated.

Hi saw that Johnny was irresolute.

“Think o’ the Wash’n’ton pie, an’ the tarts, an’ things, an’ say, Johnny,” continued the crafty Hi, “Silas Barnes says they ordered five kags er ice cream!”

That statement settled all scruples in Johnny’s mind.

“*Five kags er ice cream!*” repeated Johnny. “I’ll go with ye.”



Hi hastened to lead the way, for he knew that the time to be sure of Johnny's assistance was when his enthusiasm was active. Up the hill they trudged, and soon the bright lights in the windows of the Carlton house glimmered through the trees. Johnny wondered what Hi's scheme might be, but dared not ask, for Hi had said that he would not tell his plan until they had reached the house. And when at last they stood before the gate, Hi, for the first time, spoke.

"They's more folks raound this side er the haouse, so we'll just jump over the wall an' go raound," he whispered; "the dinin'-room's on the hin' side er the haouse, any-haow."

Johnny obediently did as Hi suggested, for Hi was a director who directed, and who expected to be obeyed.

Hi was right regarding the guests. They preferred to enjoy the broad lawn with rows of lantern-hung trees, and thus the grounds at the rear of the house were deserted. As Hi had hoped, the coast was clear.



Both boys were barefoot, and softly they made their way around to where the bright light streamed from the low windows of the dining-room. As they stood upon tiptoe, lifting their chins that they might see every viand upon the great table, Hi's eyes grew round with greedy longing, while Johnny gasped as he emitted a softly whispered "O—o—oh!"

"Be still, while I tell yer what ter do," whispered Hi; "an' 'fore ye know it, an' 'fore any on 'em comes aout ter the spread, we'll be runnin' daown ter the spring where, on top er the big rock, we'll eat aour goodies, an' jest eat, an' eat."

"M—m—m!" agreed Johnny; "but haow'll we git 'em?"

"Easy 'nough," said confident Hi; "the table's all set fer 'em, but they ain't a-goin' ter march out ter supper till quarter ter ten, so naow they's nobody in the dinin'-room, so come 'long over ter the winder an' I'll boost ye."

"What, *me*?"



Johnny fairly gasped, so great was his surprise.

"Wal, what d'ye think I bothered ter call fer ye fer? I could er got the goodies myself, but I went an' called fer ye so's ye could hev some of it, an' I *thought* ye'd be willin' ter help me."

"So I *be*," Johnny whispered; "but ef ye boost me up, an' I crawl in an' get the goodies an' git aout with 'em, seems ter me I'll be doin' the hull thing myself."

Hi was surprised. Johnny saw through the little plan! What could he now say that would smooth Johnny's ruffled feathers and coax him into a belief that he had been mistaken?

After a moment's pause, Hi spoke, purposely ignoring Johnny's speech.

"D'ye want some er the treat? Ef ye do, we'll hev ter be quick, er we won't git it. The reason *I* can't git in the winder is because ye're such a little critter ye ain't big 'nough ter boost me."

That being the actual truth, Johnny ac-



cepted it, and Hi, realizing that his argument had proved convincing, gave Johnny the "boost" which he had promised. So strenuous was his effort that Johnny landed in the room, rolled over, and bumped his head against a leg of the table. To say that he was surprised would not adequately describe his emotions, for amazement and wrath were struggling within him.

Hi heard the thump, and peeping over the window-sill, saw Johnny sitting upon the floor, rubbing his head.

"Don't stop ter rub the bump," was Hi's whispered command, "'less ye want ter be ketched!" Compassion formed no part of Hi Babson's character, but Johnny did not notice the lack of sympathy. He could hear the lively chatter and merry laughter of the guests, and believing that at any moment they might enter the dining-room and discover him, he seized a huge Washington pie and reached it out over the sill to the impatient Hi.



"Git some er that frosted cake," whispered Hi, at the same time snatching the pie, which he promptly slipped inside his blouse, and reached for the coveted cake. Johnny handed the cake to Hi, at the same time whispering:

"What'll I git next? They ain't put no ice cream on the table."

"What, no ice cream?" questioned the disgusted Hi. "Wal, give me anything; an' hurry up! Ye've got ter git the things an' git aout, ye know."

Johnny did know, and so nervous was he that he shivered whenever the voice of a chattering guest rose shrilly above the clamor of voices.

"*Hurry up!*" whispered Hi.

"*Ain't I a-hurryin'?*" was the exasperated reply.

Johnny was angry that he should be doing the risky part of the act while Hi remained in, at least, comparative safety outside the window. He decided to gather some of the good things which he could



easiest reach and with them make his escape. He believed it must be nearing the time for the guests to enjoy the treat; that now every moment that he remained was precious. He took another pie and, following Hi's example, placed it inside his blouse, gave yet another to Hi, reached for a plate of fruit cake, and was about to take it when a firm hand caught him by the collar and a familiar voice shrieked:

*"Johnny Buffum! Drap them cakes!"*

Drop them? He had dropped them; and as the relentless hand gave him yet another shake the pie which his blouse concealed rolled from its hiding-place and then under the table.

*"That I should ketch a son er mine up ter such doin's!"* shrieked Mrs. Buffum, the sentiment being expressed in jerky fashion, her vocal efforts keeping time with her slipper, which came down with vigorous whacks upon the now penitent Johnny; penitent, because he had been caught.

*"I didn't mean ter!"* he wailed.



"Yes yer did, er yer wouldn't er done it!"

Whack! Whack! went the stout slipper.

"Ow! Ow! O—oh! Hi *made* me do it!" sobbed Johnny; "an' he's outside the winder."

"No, he ain't, nuther; but you'll be outside this 'ere haouse soon's I kin leave go er yer."

Johnny, held firmly upon his mother's knee, kicked and struggled, while the slipper continued to descend with machine-like regularity, and in the midst of the excitement the guests, upon hearing Johnny's screams, poured into the dining-room and stood amazed at the tableau presented.

Mrs. Buffum was too busy chastizing Johnny to be aware of their presence, and her arm, vigorously wielding the slipper, alternately displayed and hid the tell-tale patching by which her waist had been made large enough for her rotund figure.

It was still twenty minutes before Mrs. Carlton had intended to summon her guests to the dining-room. She was talking ear-



nestly with a group of her friends, and when she looked toward the end of the room which seemed deserted she wondered where so many of her guests had fled.

It happened that those who had rushed to the dining-room were the very ones who had been most inquisitive, and their comments were characteristic.

“Just see her whack him! What’s he been doin’?”

“Look at the hole he’s made in the goodies, the little rat!”

“My! But she’s got muscle!”

“Jimminy! See her give it ter him!”

“See her *gaown*, more like! I’ll be baound she’s fergot herself, er she wouldn’t be showin’ off. *Naow* we know why she wouldn’t lift her arms!”

This last speech, whispered though it was, reached Mrs. Buffum’s ears. She dropped Johnny, who at once jumped out of the window, and, like an angry goddess of huge proportions, she faced the one who had uttered it.



“My gaown was put together as I see fit, same’s yours was, most likely,” she said, and with her arms once more concealing the tell-tale piecings, she swept from the room and at a lively pace sought to overtake Johnny, the cause of her displeasure.

After having disclosed her makeshift she could not smother her chagrin and remain at the feast.

Oddly enough, Mrs. Carlton did not know, until several days after, of the exciting scene which had been enacted in the dining-room where the feast had been spread, and so large was the number of guests that she did not realize that Mrs. Buffum was not present. The maid who was to act as waitress had noticed the spaces upon the table where the youthful marauders had hastily helped themselves, and had at once refilled the cake-plates.

It was a tempting collation, and the guests were quick to show their appreciation of the good things so bountifully provided.

And after the dainty spread had been en-



joyed, some charming music followed, and when at a late hour the guests departed, it was with sincerity that they told their charming hostess that the evening had been one of perfect pleasure.



## CHAPTER V

### A HASTY RESOLVE

ALTHOUGH it was a week since the evening of the house-warming, it was still a delightful theme for conversation, and in many a household it served as a great event from which to date the lesser happenings. Called upon to state upon what date a certain thing occurred, the housewife reckoned time after this formula :

“Wal, I can’t tell exactly which day I done it, but as near as I kin remember, it was *’baout* five days before the house-warmin’.”

Mrs. Hodgkins was more positive. “Ye needn’t be wond’rin’ when ’twas that I told ye that bit er news, fer I kin tell ye to a T. ’Twas *four* days before the house-warmin’, an’ the way I remember is that, as I say, I heared it *four days before*, an’ I faound aout ’twas true jest *four* days after.”



It had truly been a delightful evening, and Randy, on her way toward the brook, was thinking of the bright lights and brighter faces which had made the event one long to be remembered. She had not known of Johnny's escapade, and believed that nothing had occurred to make a jarring note in the evening's pleasure.

She had just given a cheery greeting to Jabez Brimblecom, who had driven past the house in order to deliver a letter to Randy.

"I was daown at Barnes's store jest as he was sortin' of the mail, an', says I, I'll be goin' by the Squire's haouse, an' I'll take Randy's letter; it'll be er pleasure."

"You are always kind," Randy said, "and though you have often brought my letters to me, you have never given me more pleasure than in bringing this one. Only think, Mr. Brimblecom, it is from Helen Dayton."

"A letter from Miss Dayton! Wal, I declare! No wonder you're pleased; fer ef ever there was a sweet, lovely gal, 'twas her, an' I ain't the only one in taown what re-



members her. Why, Mis' Brimblecom was tellin' only er day er two ago of the time when ye went daown ter Boston and stayed ter Miss Dayton's haome whilst ye went to private school. Ye had er fine time, Randy, but haow we missed ye! From fall ter spring was a long spell fer ye ter leave us all, an' 'twas hard ter git 'long without ye. Ye don't s'pose she's askin' yer ter come agin', do ye?" he asked, with real concern.

If one of the village gossips had thus questioned her, Randy would have felt annoyed, but she knew that Jabez was never curious; that only sincere interest prompted his question.

She opened her letter, and one of the first lines that attracted her attention answered Jabez's question. Randy laughed gayly.

"Yes, there *is* an invitation in the letter," she said, at the same time looking up into the eager face which peered down at her from beneath the broad brim of his old straw hat.

"Will ye go, Randy? Though ye 'most



couldn't help it. A visit ter her would be er delight."

"That is just what it will be. Yes, I'll accept it, for she so wishes me to come, and I know that mother will be willing. Oh, who could have dreamed of such a pleasure?"

Jabez thought that he had never seen Randy's smile so radiant, or her eyes so dazzlingly bright, and long after he had left her he continued to think of the sweet face which he and his good wife had loved and admired since, as a tiny child, they had known her.

Randy watched the team as it turned the corner, and then sat down to read the letter. She had hastily scanned it, that she might answer Jabez's question; she would read it carefully, lest one dear word might be missed.

Helen Dayton was now the wife of Professor Marden, a valued instructor and lecturer at Harvard. Remembering what a delight Randy's first visit had been to her-



self, and to Aunt Marcia, with whom she made her home, Helen had written to ask if she might soon have the pleasure of her company for a number of weeks.

Randy read and re-read the letter in which Helen so lovingly urged her to accept the invitation. After the letter had been replaced in its envelope, Randy held it tightly clasped, and it seemed as if Helen's beautiful face were before her, the dark eyes earnestly pleading.

"Of course I will go," Randy softly murmured. "I could not think of refusing. Fancy missing such a pleasure as that!"

With light steps she turned homeward. She had had but a short walk, but who could wait to share such a delightful letter?

During her stay in the village Helen Dayton had been a favorite with all, and in the Weston family she was held in loving regard.

Randy's cheeks were flushed with anticipation; her eyes were bright, her red lips parted. She stepped up on to the doorstone



and paused before entering; Aunt Prudence was speaking. Randy could not have told why she hesitated at the door. Something which Aunt Prudence was saying arrested her attention.

“I declare, Philury, ye’ll hev ter write er long letter; takes so many words ter make er person und’stand what ye want of ’em.”

“Naow let me tell ye, I’ll write the hull letter fer ye, ef it’s stretched from Dan ter Beersheeby,” Philury replied.

“Ye’re a good girl,” Aunt Prudence replied, “an’ I know ye’re patient, but they’s jest no end ter the things what ought ter be writ, an’ the idee er sprainin’ my wrist jest as I’d ’baout detarmined ter go aout there fer a few weeks an’ set things ter rights. I b’lieve I never was so put aout.”

“I wouldn’t fret,” Philury replied. “Mebbe it’ll turn aout all right ef ye let me write an’ giv ’em ter und’stand that ye mean what ye say when ye tell ’em what ye want did, an’ ye kin say ye’ll be there in er few weeks ter see ef them things *has* been did.”



"That's all very well," Aunt Prudence replied, "but I do'no' when I kin leave here. The fust time I twisted my arm, 'twas of er Sat'day, an' bein's we was busy, I said nothin' 'baout it, but kept on usin' of it. Naow I've give it the second twist, I *can't* use it, an' between the pain in my wrist an' the frettin' 'baout my pesky little farm, I'm well-nigh wild."

"I could go out on the farm for her; I believe I could set things right as well as she could," thought Randy; but a second thought quickly followed.

"If I go I lose my visit to Helen."

Again Philury spoke.

"Ye've been generous to stay here, whilst yer own farm needed yer 'tention," she said.

"Hush! Don't you ever mention that idee. They needed me here, an' I tried ter let hired help jest keep the little place goin'. What's the use in livin', Philury, ef ye ain't a bit self-fergittin' and gen'rous?"

Quickly Randy tucked the dear letter in



the folds of her waist and entered. She felt that she must speak at once, or her longing to visit Helen would triumph over her better impulse.

"I will go, Aunt Prudence," she said, steadily, "so Philury need not write the long letter. You must stay here and let Dr. Bushnell care for your wrist, while Philury takes care of you and the family. Truly, you can trust me; you don't know how business-like I can be."

"Send ye aout there, Randy? Why, yer ma would hev er fit at the idee, an' ye well know that Prue would be wild. Fancy me er sendin' my brother's darter on such a arrant!"

"You are not sending me, Aunt Prudence; I'm sending myself, and truly I believe I shall do well."

It was a difficult task to speak so bravely, for the invitation was uppermost in her mind, and she laid her hand upon her breast where, under the folds of her dress, the letter lay. In her own room at night she would



answer it. She would tell Helen how great a struggle it had been to relinquish the promised delight of the visit. Helen should not think that her invitation could be lightly refused.

It was a very tender letter which she wrote, thanking Helen sincerely, and telling her how great was her disappointment, how truly she longed to enjoy the pleasure which Helen had assured her should be hers if she came to Boston. Prue coaxed for permission to post it, little dreaming what Randy had written, for letters were so often received from Helen and promptly answered that the arrival of a missive from Boston caused no surprise.

Prue ran down the path, shouting loudly to her playmate to follow :

“ Hi! Hi Babson! I got to go to the pos'-office; come 'long with me.”

The small boy waited for no urging. Prue was a winsome little lass, for whose favor Johnny Buffum and Hi Babson were strenuous claimants.



While Hi hoarded his few pennies for the purpose of buying pickled limes and licorice with which to charm Prue, Johnny, who seldom saw a penny, risked life and limb to gather sweet apples and wild grapes for the little lady. His latest offering of apples of questionable quality he laid directly at Prue's feet, for the limb upon which he sat broke, and both boy and apples came down to earth within a few inches of where Prue stood.

"Why, Johnny Buffum! 'F you'd fallen on to me you'd have hurt me just awful," she cried.

"Wal, I *didn't*!" Johnny declared, and Prue accepted the apples.

Arrived at the store, they looked about for the proprietor, but Silas Barnes was dicker-ing with a farmer over the price of a lot of butter, while Joel Simpkins had gone off for a half-holiday. Prue looked eagerly into the case where a small lot of candy was kept, while Hi edged toward the door. He thought he saw a chance to economize.



Really, he couldn't find pennies often enough to treat Prue every time that he escorted her."

"Come, Prue," he called, "we can't wait all day fer him ter git through talkin'. Put yer letter 'side er the mail-bag, an' the next time we come daown here I'll buy ye er treat."

Prue left the letter beside the bag, never once thinking that it was a careless thing to do; her one regret was that Hi's coins remained in his pocket, and the candy was still in the case.

As they trudged along the road, Hi assured her that she was the *niciest* girl he knew, but the little maid considered his compliments empty. She had dreamed of something more tangible than adjectives.

To his statement that he would rather play with her than any girl in the village, because he considered her the prettiest, and sweetest, she made what Hi considered an irrelevant reply.

"Johnny Buffum's a *very* nice boy; I



shouldn't wonder if I played with *him* to-morrow," she said.

And when Silas Barnes secured the butter at a bargain price he remembered that some parcels of new goods had been left lying upon the counter, and he proceeded to arrange the packages upon the shelves. He had an eye for the decorative, and long he pondered over the mighty question as to the comparative beauty of alternate packages in blue and yellow wrappers, or a single row of yellow corn-starch packets with a complete row of blue-wrapped laundry starch below it.

A small boy who had hurried in watched Silas as he arranged and re-arranged his stock. He picked up the letter and, for want of better amusement, slipped it in and out of a crack in the counter. He did it many times, while with fascinated eyes he watched Silas. A big fly came in at the open door and, as if with deliberate intention, flew directly toward Silas, and buzzed about his ears.



"Drat ye!" he exclaimed, and the startled boy lost his hold upon the letter, and it fell through the crack.

Barnes turned to catch the fly and, for the first time, saw the boy.

"Hello, sonny! What yer want?"

The frightened boy thought that Barnes knew of the letter and in a moment would miss it.

"I fergot my arrant," he said, and rushed from the store.

For weeks the letter lay beneath the counter, until Joel Simpkins, stooping to look for a pencil which he had dropped, found it, and, never guessing how long it had been delayed, dropped it into the mail bag.

Helen was puzzled that her letter received no reply, while Randy, as the weeks went by, wondered that Helen wrote never a word of regret that they could not together enjoy the pleasures which she had planned.

Randy's resolve to go to the little farm as messenger from Aunt Prudence had



caused a sensation in the household, and every member of the family looked at it from a different standpoint.

The Squire approved, but ardently wished that it had not been imperative that *someone* should go, and that Randy should be the one. Her mother questioned if it might not be that an older person could do better, and believed that Randy would find the situation difficult.

Prue cried without restraint at the thought of her Randy's departure, while Philury, usually so blithe, so cheerful, went about her work in a manner which plainly showed that the thought of Randy's proposed absence had chased away her gayety.

"I think I am right, father," Randy said. "Aunt Prudence's sprained wrist will keep her here for some weeks; and think of the long stay she has made with us, just because she knew that she was a help and a comfort to us. I feel as if I *must* help her now."

"And so you shall, Randy," the Squire replied; "I believe ye kin do well fer Aunt



Prudence, an' I'm glad ye're willin' ter try. I guess you'll hev ter write home often, tho'; we'll hev ter hear from ye 's often as ev'ry day er so."

The few days occupied with hasty preparation flew by as if impelled by magic, and even after they had watched the long train out of sight it seemed impossible that Randy was hastening toward Aunt Prudence's little farm.

Jotham had been at the train. He had been sorry enough that it had been necessary for her to go, but resolving to do something to make the long ride bearable, he had brought some flowers, a box of candy, and an interesting book.

"Not very much to offer you, Randy," he had said, "but enough to tell you that your friend goes with you in heart, if not in person."

It was impossible to say that one member of the family missed Randy more than did the others, but the two who showed most what her absence cost them were Prue and



Philury. It had been Philury's habit to sing persistently, continuously, and even boisterously while about her work. She was wont to string together phrases, and if an occasional rhyme occurred, Philury called it poetry. These verses she sang to music, equally original, and the result was a series of musical compositions which were always amazing, and frequently sufficiently noisy to be called "stunning."

One morning Prue ran out to see if Johnny Buffum or his sisters were in sight, or if Hi Babson might be seen coming up the road.

"Randy's away, an' nobody's in sight to play with; I do'no' what I want to do. Tabby's new kitten ain't been named yet, an' it's ten or 'leven weeks old," she said. She had been reading her old book of fairy tales and trying to decide if Prince or King were suitable names to bestow upon the kitten. She picked him up and ran toward the house, intending to ask Philury's advice.

Hark! Was that Philury singing? Yes,



it surely was; but why was she singing with that subdued, nasal tone, and *what* was she singing?

Prue listened, and her eyes grew round, for this is what she heard:

“Sugar don’t taste sweet to me,  
Kerosene’s as good as tea,  
Bread an’ butter tastes like hay  
Whilst aour Randy stays away.”

A wail from Prue was the tribute which the small girl paid Philury’s exceedingly doleful composition as she burst into the room, holding the kitten in her arms, while the tears rolled down her cheeks.

“Oh, oh, oh!” she cried, while Philury, with genuine concern, looked Prue over, expecting to find unusually large bumps or scratches.

“Whatever’s the matter, Prue?” she asked; “neither you nor the kitten has got any broken bones.”

“No, no!” wailed the small girl, “’tain’t nothing broke; it’s the tune you was singing. ’Tis just real horrid to have Randy away,



but that tune *made* me cry. I was just coming in to ask you which you would name the kitten, Prince or King, but that tune made me cry, an' I fergot the kitten."

"Wal, now, I'm reel sorry my chunes made ye so upsot. S'pose we settle on that little critter's name right naow, an' then ter cel'brate an' cheer ye I'll sing a chune that'll make ye feel jest gay."

Prue smiled through her tears.

"Naow, they's some outlandish folks," said Philury, "I can't think where they live, what names their children this way. They set the babies daown an' watch ter see what they do fust, an' then name 'em accordin'. Let's set the kitten daown an' see what she'll do."

Prue dropped kitty upon the floor, and it scampered out of the room, sprang from the doorstone, and then commenced to bite a long grass blade.

"There!" exclaimed Philury, "they *is* some sense in the idee. The little imp is eatin' grass; that shows his name is goin'



ter be Nebuchadnezzar. Don't ye know the lesson Sunday was 'baout him?"

"Why, so it was," agreed Prue, greatly impressed.

Philury's eyes twinkled.

"Ye can call him Nezzzy fer short," she suggested.

"No, no, I won't," cried Prue; "we'll call the whole name, even if we're in a hurry," she said; "an' now sing something jolly; you promised, you know."

The girl was truly sorry that her own sadness because of Randy's absence had caused her to sing so doleful a song that Prue had been moved to tears. She thought a moment, then she said:

"Haow'll this do?

"Randy's comin' home, I guess,  
In several weeks, some more er less,  
An' when aour Randy's come ter taown,  
Ye'll see us dance right up an' daown."

A rollicking tune accompanied the words, and Prue, with a smiling face, declared the song to be "just beautiful."



## CHAPTER VI

### A TEST OF LOYALTY

As Randy hastened up the little gravel path, the dust-laden weeds left their imprint upon her skirt, and the garden beds showed all too plainly that they had been neglected.

Aunt Prudence had many times changed the management upon her little place, and as Randy glanced from the unkempt garden toward the house, the dingy curtain blown by the breeze from the open window made her wonder if the present caretaker were the worst of the lot.

As if to prove that the house and garden were not the only untidy objects to be seen, the door opened, and a slatternly woman came down the path.

“I’m some expectin’ comp’ny; be ye Mis’ Weston’s niece?” she asked. “Seems ter me ye look kinder young ter know much ’baout runnin’ a place.”



Randy longed to tell the woman that a *child* could see that the place was in desperate need of care, but she knew that such a statement would be resented; the woman looked capable of saying or doing anything which was disagreeable.

"I am Randy Weston, and I shall try to see what can be done. Aunt Prudence has given me some instructions and although, as you say, I am young, I believe that I can follow them."

The woman looked at her curiously. "Wal, they do say young folks 'most allus thinks they can do gret dunder," she said, and tossing her head, she turned toward the house.

It had required a deal of courage for Randy to assume so much responsibility, and now that she had reached her destination, and stood facing the task, she earnestly hoped that she might acquit herself creditably. Upon one thing she was determined: she would be mistress of the situation. She had arrived in the afternoon, and had found



the room assigned to her a most unattractive one. From its tiny window she looked out toward meadow-land and field, and at once saw the contrast between the neglected crops upon Aunt Prudence's little farm and the well-tilled acres of her father's property.

She was lonely and homesick, but she thought of Aunt Prudence and knew that the farm had been nearly ruined because its generous owner had been thoughtful for her brother's family, and forgetful of self.

"I'll try to be generous," thought Randy, "and to-morrow I'll look about to learn where I'd best begin;" but before she slept that night she had decided exactly what her first step would be.

If the woman had been unattractive at first sight, her husband proved to be even less prepossessing, nor was his manner reassuring. The evening repast caused Randy a fresh attack of homesickness. Coarse bread of a grimy color, slices of fried salt pork, and, as if to give piquancy to the fru-



gal meal, cucumbers were served which, judging from their wilted condition, must have been off the vines at least a week.

"This ain't much of er meal fer comp'ny," Mrs. Skinner, remarked, "but we didn't know ye was comin' ter-day."

"Do'no' what diff'rence 'twould made ef we had; this is 'baout all this 'ere place affords. 'Taint no kind er place, anyhaow," growled her husband. Then followed a lengthy catalogue of those things which the farm lacked, to which Randy listened with ill-concealed impatience, while she mentally added two other things which Mr. Skinner had not mentioned—a competent farmer and a neat housekeeper.

The morning woke so bright, so fair, that one might have thought it designed that every living thing might have a holiday.

Randy looked from the little chamber window and smiled as a spray of the clambering vine swung in and touched her cheek.

"A pleasant greeting," she whispered,



and cheered by the sunshine and the vine's caress, she wondered if after all Mrs. Skinner and her husband would be tractable, and the task which she had attempted to perform less arduous than it appeared.

It is a strange fact that many people will neglect their own business if, by so doing, they can gain time to direct another person's affairs. Thus they pose as being especially kind-hearted and generous, whereas in truth they are actuated only by curiosity and an intense longing to be meddlesome.

One of these tiresome individuals dropped every household duty in the laudable desire to sally forth and call at the tiny farmhouse to offer some advice to the very young person in charge.

Randy, at the window, was reaching out, attempting to train the straggling vines which clambered around the window. She had removed the untidy sash curtains, and had directed Mrs. Skinner to wash them, thereby offending her, and causing her to return to the kitchen to indulge in a fit of



sulks. Having said that the curtains should be washed, Randy ignored the woman's unpleasant attitude.

She was humming a little tune, and fastening the vines in place when she heard footsteps approaching while a heavy implement marked time for the vigorous pedestrian.

Randy turned to look at the stranger just as the woman reached the window.

"Don't bother to open the door; I ain't comin' in," she remarked, "fer I'm in er hurry, an' I kin say all I've got ter standin' right here. S'pose ye'd like ter know who I be, wouldn't ye? Wal, I'm Mrs. Jehiel Hinks, an' my fust cousin's husband's second son was postmaster er this taown oncet."

Randy could not deny the fact stated, nor could she understand why the woman had walked any distance to tell her.

"Indeed," she demurely replied.

Thus encouraged, the woman grasped her pudgy umbrella yet more firmly, and sought





“Wal, I’m Mrs. Jehiel Hinks.” — *Page 104.*







further to enlighten Randy as to her pedigree.

“Yes, an’ my gran’ther fit inter the Revolution, an’ my gret aunt’s husband was er lawyer, so *I* know somethin’.”

Randy could not see that that was proven, but she could not say so. She nodded and smiled to signify that she had heard, and the loquacious one proceeded.

“Yes, an’ I took my ambrill—ye never kin tell when it may rain—an’ drapped ev’ry-thing ter come over ter give ye er few idees, an’ I had ter travel four miles an’ er half ter do it.”

“You meant to be kind,” Randy replied, “but I think I shall be able to get on nicely with the directions which Aunt Prudence gave me before I came.”

“She may have give yer d’rections what ter *do*, but she couldn’t tell ye what has been *did*, fer she ain’t been here ter know. Naow *I* know, an’ I’m goin’ ter tell ye.

“Fust thing ter tell ye is that ye’d better look aout fer Skinner; he’ll bear watchin’.



Next, ye'd better see that Ob'diah Wilson's boy ain't often on the place. Young Ob'diah's er reg'lar limb er Satan, an' I ain't the only one what says so. Why, that 'ere youngster wouldn't mind firin' yer cat inter yer rain-water barrel, ef he was mejum sure 'twould pester ye."

Randy laughed.

"He can't do that," she said, "for we have no rain-water barrel, and no cat."

"I see by the way ye laugh that ye treat this business reel flippant, but ye shouldn't. Naow, ye may not hev noticed it, but they's er number er slats busted in the hencoop."

"I know it, but as we have no hens, I'm trying to have other repairing done first," said Randy. She was tired of the woman's persistence.

"Did ye know some er the stuns is tumbled off'n the wall 'side er the cornfield, an' the punkins is bein' trod onter, most likely by the neighbors' boys? "

"I believe I know what the place needs," said Randy.



“Oh, ye do, do ye? Wal, yer aunt ain’t no kind of er woman ter leave her prop’ty fer er gal ter manage, d’ye know that?”

Randy’s eyes flashed.

“I know that Aunt Prudence is one of the best women in the world, and I know, too, that I’ll not let *anyone* say a word against her.”

“Tut, tut, tut! Ye needn’t be ’fended; I only mean ter say that ef she’d er stayed here an’ minded the farm, ’stead er gal’vantin’ raound er vis’tin’ rel’tives while she let ev’rything go ter loose ends here, the place would look like somethin’. She ain’t no manager; anybody could see that, an’ ef she hadn’t been so foolish——”

“*Stop!*”

The woman actually jumped back a step, while with open mouth she regarded Randy.

“You cannot talk so about Aunt Prudence, for I am too loyal to listen. If you try to say one more unkind word about her I shall close this window.”



“Ye’ve got er sensible face, so I’d think ye’d be willin’ ter listen ter reason. Ef ye’re so turrible sens’tive ’baout haow a body speaks of yer relations, I wonder ef ye’d be techy ef I spoke er the cabbages. They ain’t headin’ up, an’ they’s one thing ye’ll *hev* ter do; ye’ll *hev* ter watch Mis’ Skinner.”

“No she *won’t*, fer ye’ll do ’nough watchin’ fer two, any day,” screamed Mrs. Skinner, who, having heard a familiar voice, had entered the sitting-room just in time to hear the remarks regarding herself.

As if propelled by steam, the self-elected adviser hurried away around the corner of the house in order that she might make a short cut across the fields where at the door of another persistent gossip she could tell what she had seen and heard.

While laughing at Mrs. Hinks’s hasty retreat, Mrs. Skinner forgot to sulk, and she also forgot to do any of those things of which Randy had spoken. In the afternoon Randy wrote a letter to the dear ones at



home, in which she tried to speak cheerfully of affairs at the little farm.

So trying was the following week that had the writing of the letter been postponed, it would have been a far less cheery epistle which the Squire's family received.

When a week had passed, Randy realized that the time had come when patience had ceased to be a virtue. If the housekeeper was inclined to let the house keep itself, her husband was no less neglectful of his duties at the farm.

Crops which had given promise early in the season were now choked with weeds, and the hoe being an unpopular implement with Dave Skinner, he promptly announced it as his opinion, that "'twould ruin the craps ter hoe 'em naow."

It was evident that all efforts to reclaim the farm were futile, so long as Dave Skinner and his wife remained upon the place.

"Ef any time ye git where ye'd like er bit of advice without waitin' ter write ter me for't, go daown the road quite er piece



toward the village till ye come ter the biggest farmhouse ever seen, painted yaller. One er the best men that ever lived lives there. His name's Matthew Langdon. Ask him ter set ye straight, Randy, an' ye kin depend he'll do it."

This had been Aunt Prudence's advice when she had held Randy's hand at parting.

"I can't do better than to call upon Mr. Langdon now," she thought. To think was to act, and telling Mrs. Skinner that she was going out for a short time, Randy hurried down the road in search of the "biggest farmhouse" which she had ever seen.

The long, winding road was shaded by huge trees whose leafy branches interlaced overhead, the sunlight danced a flickering measure, the tiny blossoms swayed in the breeze, and Randy, after she had passed several small farmhouses, began to wonder if the "biggest" house had disappeared.

It was a beautiful road, but the houses now seemed farther apart, and Randy was beginning to wish it might have been less



lonely, when the trill of a merry whistle was followed by the barefoot whistler coming around the bend of the road. He saw Randy and stopped whistling, glanced shyly up at her, and was intending to pass, when she paused to question him.

"Do you know where Mr. Langdon lives?" she asked.

The small boy looked up at her with ardent admiration.

"Yep," he responded. "Ain't your hair curly though? Sis does hern up on papers ev'ry night, but it don't look like that."

"Is his house far from here?" questioned Randy, ignoring his outspoken compliment.

"Leetle further'n I kin fire er stone. Want me ter show ye where? I'd *like* ter go 'long er ye," he said.

"Indeed, yes," she said, smiling at the boy's eagerness, "I'd like your company."

For a time they trudged along in silence, Randy eager to reach Mr. Langdon's home, and wondering how he would receive her, and if he would be kind; while the boy



studied her face and marveled at its charm. At last he spoke.

"Ye look like that heriwine of er story in er paper what I found, an' pa licked me fer readin'," he said. "The gal had shinin' hair, an' the picture on the front page made me want ter read the story. I faound the paper an' sot daown behind the barn ter read it, an' jest as I got ter the place where the villain what had been an' gone an' hooked her dimun's was bein' ketched, pa ketched *me*, an' I was sorry—sorry he ketched me, I mean.

"That's his haouse."

Randy looked in the direction which the boy's finger indicated. She was amused by his story, and she knew that he expected her to sympathize with him. She knew, too, from his description of the paper that his father had doubtless been wise and right, but she could not deny that it was trying in the extreme to be ruthlessly snatched from reading a story when he had reached its most interesting point.



“That’s his haouse, but he don’t seem ter be now’eres raound. Say, be ye goin’ ter visit him?”

“Oh, no, only just doing an errand, and making a call,” she said.

“Oh,—I was goin’ ter say I’d call on ye, ef ye was er stayin’ there, ’cause ye’re so pretty, an’ I like ye. Ye look like the gal I couldn’t read ’baout.”

His little face was doleful and Randy smiled upon her ardent little admirer.

“And so you shall,” she said. “I am Randy Weston, and just now I’m staying at Aunt Prudence Weston’s farm. You may call to-morrow if you like.”

“*Bet* I will,” he said; “an’ say, I’m Obadiah Wilson’s boy. They call me Obed fer short; *you* kin, I’ll let ye.”

So this was the “limb of Satan”! Randy laid her hand upon his shoulder, and smiled at the upturned face.

“*I’ll* call you Obed, and you may come over to see me; you’ve been a fine little escort,” she said.



She turned toward the great yellow house, while the small boy hurried down the road with footsteps light as air. He had been denied the pleasure of reading about a beautiful heroine, but he had *met* a live one, and she had called him her escort. He did not know exactly what that meant, but he fancied it must be a knight or something equally fine.

The perfume of mignonette, of many-hued nasturtiums, of roses and pinks came floating toward her as she stood upon the doorstep and rang the tiny bell. The trim garden beds were kept in perfect order, and what a wealth of bloom they were offering the one who loved the flowers and expended so much time upon them.

She watched the butterflies hovering over the flowers, while here and there a bee droned his drowsy music. Out from beneath a clump of marigolds a huge yellow-legged hen came to eye the intruder with wonder and curiosity. Having scrutinized the girl, and decided that she was harmless,



she picked her way down the walk, uttering contented little clucks.

Randy wondered if no one was at home. She rang the bell more vigorously. This time she heard sounds as of someone coming through the hall. When the door opened Randy looked up at the handsome, elderly man who stood waiting to hear what her errand might be.

“What a kindly face!” she thought. “I should like to see Mr. Langdon,” she said.

“Then come right in, for I am Matthew Langdon,” was the genial reply, and his pleasant smile and warm handclasp told Randy that she had found a friend.

He led her into a cheery sitting-room, offered her a quaint, chintz-covered chair, and drawing another from its place against the wall, sat opposite her with an air of being ready to listen to what she had to say.

“I am Randy Weston, and I am staying at my aunt’s little farm,” she said, “and to-day I found myself so puzzled——”



She had not intended to tell him how hard the task had been, but the tremor in her voice told him of her homesickness, her inability to cope with the problems before her; told him more clearly than words could have done.

He leaned forward and took her hands in his.

"Why, my dear girl," he said, in real concern, "are you staying with Dave Skinner and his wife, while they try to run the farm?"

Randy restrained the tears which rose at the touch of the friendly hand. He should not think her weak and silly.

"They are not half trying to run the farm, but they are trying to run me, and I came here believing that I could do so well for Aunt Prudence."

Then she told him of Aunt Prudence's kindness, and that her little farm had been neglected because of her devotion to her brother's family.

"I thought the least I could do for her



was to come here and set the place in order, and thus far I've accomplished nothing. Think how well I promised, and what have I to tell her? "

She looked up into the kind gray eyes.

"Tell her, the next letter ye write, that things are goin' on all right, an' that in less'n no time the place 'll look fine. Ye may wait a few days 'fore writin', an' between you 'n' me yer Aunt Prudence's place 'll be ready ter take er prize. We'll run it tergether, an' with yer permission, we'll run the Skinners *aout*, an' run somebody wuth havin' *in*."

"Then you *will* help me; oh, how shall I thank you?" she asked.

His eyes twinkled as he said, "By tellin' me haow ye happened ter come ter me, for I'm glad 'nough ye did."

"Aunt Prudence told me, if at any time I found myself perplexed, to go at once to you, and you would advise me."

"Oh, she did, did she? Wal, there are few things I wouldn't do fer yer Aunt Pru-



dence. She's the finest, the best woman I ever knew," said Mr. Langdon.

"Why, she told me that you were the best man in the world," Randy replied.

"Wal, there was only one time that she wouldn't listen ter me, but that's a good while ago."

His eyes had become thoughtful, dreamy, but he rose and endeavored to shake off his reminiscent mood.

"I'll be over the fust thing ter-morrer morning," he said, "an' together we'll see haow fast we kin make things fly."

It was with a light heart that Randy left him, and she turned at his gate to nod and smile at him.

"I'll be prompt," he called.

"And I shall be so glad to see you," Randy replied.



## CHAPTER VII

### JABEZ BRIMBLECOM'S SCHEME

THE usual group of gossips and news-gatherers were assembled in Barnes's store, engaged, as usual, in discussing the affairs of the village, the political situation, and a few other trifles which they felt quite capable of handling.

Joel Simpkins had stated it as his opinion that Josiah Boyden as a property-holder and influential citizen was not an ornament to the town, and also that the President was not properly filling his position as chief executive, whereat, old Nate Burnham told Joel to run for President the next term, and thus try to get a chance to save the country.

News was scarce, and crops had been talked of until there was nothing left to be said, while there was hardly one member of



the village social life who had not been discussed, when Jabez Brimblecom sauntered into the store.

Immediately the group of chatterers assumed an air of interest; Jabez always had something to say.

He was a typical farmer, whose shrewd, kindly face was brightened by a pair of twinkling blue eyes. He joined the group, withdrew the straw which he had been chewing, and made a remark which surprised his friends.

"I'm goin' daown ter Bosting ter visit Mis' C. Barnard Boardman, my Cousin Sabriny Brimblecom that was."

"Goin' ter visit Sabriny?"

"I snum! Ye've got taste!"

"Thought ye'd seen 'baout 'nough er her."

"Ye worked 'tarnal hard ter git good an' rid of her the last time she visited ye; what possesses ye ter go 'n' make up with her?"

Such were the comments which his speech called forth. Jabez waited until their excitement had abated, then he said:



“So I did see ’nough of her, an’ that’s why I’m goin’ daown ter visit her. When she was here, me an’ Mis’ Brimblecom got mejum tired of her, fer she was what most folks called *tremenjous* dis’gree’ble. I kep settin’ jobs fer her to do, thinkin’ I’d tire her aout, but it didn’t work till I axed her ter pick pertater bugs. She was reel mad, an’ she packed all her fine duds an’ took the fust train fer home. She vaowed she’d never visit us ag’in, but jest fer fear she’ll think better on’t, I’m goin’ ter visit her. I’ll bet I kin keep her off.”

“’Twould be a joke on ye ’f she came gallivantin’ home with ye, Jabez,” chuckled Nate Burnham.

“She won’t do that, I’ll promise ye,” Jabez replied, “fer she ’baout disgusted us with her showy clothes, her par’sols, an’ bunnits trimmed with feathers an’ fringe an’ goodness knows what else; an’ while she was a-wearin’ of ’em, never liftin’ er finger ter help Mis’ Brimblecom, but settin’ raound an’ tellin’ haow she was so turrible ’risty-



cratic that she couldn't wash dishes an' sich. D'ye blame me fer axin' her ter tackle them pertater bugs? "

"I wish ye luck, Jabez," said Silas Barnes, "an' we'd like ter hear haow your plan works."

"I'll let ye know," said Jabez, and a chorus of voices wished him good luck!

"I've sent word I'm er comin'," said Jabez, "an' I sent the letter jest so's she won't hev time ter tell me not ter. I'm goin' ter take the four o'clock train this afternoon, an' when I've been there long 'nough so's they's somethin' ter tell 'baout, I'll send ye er letter, Barnes, what ye kin read ter the craowd."

Jabez Brimblecom mounted the steps of the apartment house and rang the bell to announce that he had arrived. Then, placing his huge carpet-bag upon the upper step, he leaned against the doorway.

He knew that he might have to wait for a welcome, and his eyes twinkled merrily as



he wondered what sort of a welcome it would be.

“Wonder ef she got my note, an’ what she’ll say when she gits good an’ ready ter come ter the door. It’s lucky I ain’t lookin’ fer what they call er ’fectionate greetin’, fer I won’t be s’prised when I don’t git it, but one thing I’ve sot my mind on ter: I’m er goin’ ter stay as long as I think it’s wuth while, whatsoever Sabriny does er says.”

Having made this vow, Jabez ceased speaking, and commenced to whistle softly. He believed that Sabriny would not hasten to the door, so he continued to whistle to occupy his term of waiting. He had commenced with “Greenville,” followed it with “Yankee Doodle,” next “Hail, Columbia,” and, because these constituted his entire repertoire, reverted to his first selection, “Greenville,” but before he had completed it the door opened, and Sabriny stood before him.

“Well, I declare!” she exclaimed. “I



read yer letter 'baout an hour ago, an' 'fore I've ketched my breath, here ye be!"

"Ye don't say ye're pleased ter see me, Sabriny, but ye *must* be, 's I'm yer cousin, so I'll come right in," said Jabez, and, grasping the handles of his carpet-bag, he stepped into the hall, and commenced to mount the stairs.

Sabriny stared at the ascending figure, and then followed it up the three flights to the tiny upper hall where the door of her small flat stood open. And when they had sat down, it was Jabez who opened the conversation.

"Wal, I declare, Sabriny, I'm glad I've arriv. This 'ere flat ain't very airy; but 'twas a long trip in the cars, an' I'm so kind er tired, I'm mejum glad ter be *anywhere*."

"Haow's Mis' Brimblecom?"

Sabriny thus ignored Jabez's remark by asking a question.

"She's pooty well," he replied, "but not nigh well 'nough ter ent'tain comp'ny. That's why I come daown ter see ye. Ef ye



couldn't come up, I'd come daown, an', Sabriny, I've somethin' ter tell ye; ev'ry time ye make us er visit, ye may caount on seein' me, fer I'll come right daown ter Bosting an' return it."

"Why, Jabez! Haow kin ye leave the farm?"

"Oh, Mis' Brimblecom's there ter hold the farm daown; nobody'll run away with it. Ye visit us 'most allus in the summer, an' I can foller yer in the fall, when er visit ter Bosting is reel pleasant. Take it naow; 'baout all the work is done, er underway, an' the men know jest haow ter keep ter work till it's finished. I kin spend six weeks with ye jest as well as not, an' p'raps longer, ef ye say so."

Say so! Sabriny could not think what to say. She said something about a bit of work which she must do, and left the room until she could regain her composure.

"*Six weeks,*" she whispered, as she hastened toward the little kitchen.

"Six weeks," Jabez softly said; "I won-



der ef I kin stand livin' up a-top er this 'ere place 's long as that! What with the heat, an' the skimpy meals, an' Sabriny throw'd in, it'll be doin' stunts ter stay, I tell ye."

When Mr. C. Barnard Boardman came home and found his unexpected visitor he rose to the occasion and tried to be the genial host, but his pompous manner, as usual, disgusted Jabez.

Mr. Boardman was a florid little man, whose shape and manner made one think of a small balloon. He shook his guest's hand, and gave him an effusive welcome, which Sabriny considered the extreme of elegance, although she hoped that its fervor would not cause Jabez to stay even longer than he had intended.

"My very dear and esteemed relative," said Mr. Boardman, "I hasten to assure you of my unbounded delight and my limitless pleasure in having you as my guest; I may say *our* guest."

"Lan', yes," agreed Jabez, "ye kin say



*aour* comp'ny, fer reely Sabriny's the rel'tive."

"Truly, truly, as you have said," twittered the little man, like an overgrown sparrow; "but I am proud to be considered a cousin, too."

"Wal, I do'no's I mind," said Jabez, while under his breath he said: "Wish he'd set daown, 'stead er floppin' raound so."

"I welcome you to our domicile."

"'S that what ye call it?" questioned Jabez; "wal, I do'no's I'll ever git it straight. Fust I called it er ten'ment, but Sabriny wouldn't hev that. Next, I called it er *flat*, but she said 'twas a apartment, an' naow it's a dommy—what is it? Er dommy-sile? Wal, I guess I kin remember that, but don't change the name often; it makes it somewhat diff'kilt."

It was fortunate that Mr. Boardman spent but few hours of the day in his home, for little as Jabez cared for Sabriny, he liked her husband less. Always just, Jabez fully realized that Mr. Boardman intended



to be kind, but his flashy dress, his exaggerated courtesy, his restless manner, gave Jabez what he called the "fidgits," and he was delighted that the little man left home at an early hour, and usually returned late.

If Sabriny had endeavored to make herself a disagreeable guest, she had succeeded, and now she was a most unwilling hostess. She had spent long summers at the Brimblecom farm, yet she felt no generous impulse to return hospitality.

Jabez's attitude was most amusing. He settled down to *endure*, he could not enjoy his visit, and from his conversation and manner one could not have guessed if he had decided to stay a month or a year.

It occurred to Sabriny that when she had last visited the farm, Jabez had been continually setting tasks for her to do; she had been greatly displeased, and had terminated her visit abruptly, and now she wondered how it would do to turn the tables and from time to time ask Jabez to help her in her



household duties. It might be that he would decide to make a short visit. Accordingly, one morning Sabriny bustled into the sitting-room, where Jabez sat reading the paper.

"Jabez! Jabez!" she cried, "I want yer should come right aout an' wipe my dishes." She expected an indignant reply, and was disgusted with his cheerful acquiescence.

"Wipe yer dishes? Why, yes, 'n indeed; ef they's any one thing that's more amusin' than 'nother, it's wipin' dishes." He followed her to the kitchen and swung the great towel around and over the plates and saucers with such amazing vigor that Mrs. Boardman began to wish that she had not asked him to attempt the task.

"Look out, Jabez! Ye'll land them plates on the floor ef ye ain't keerful," she cried.

"Don't ye be narvous, Sabriny," was the cheerful answer. "I'm wipin' vig'rous, but I ain't drappin' nothin', an' when dinner-time comes I'll tell ye naow I'll peel yer per-taters; ef they's any one thing I hanker fer,



it's er chance ter peel veg'tables. Sometimes it seems 's ef I fairly itched ter."

Sabriny was puzzled. What could be done with such a cheerful helper? Task after task she offered him, and Jabez did each one, sometimes smiling so continuously that, as she watched him, she wondered if he considered housework a joke.

After a few days, Sabriny decided that, in the interest of economy, it would be best to excuse Jabez from performing household tasks, for he swept the dining-room carpet so furiously that it began to show that a muscular hand wielded the broom. Places which had been thin now showed small holes. His zealous dish-wiping had been nothing less than a cyclone in the kitchen, and as a result many pieces had been broken, while as a vegetable-parer, Jabez had shown himself to be a lightning worker.

Economy was one of Sabriny's many whims, and when she saw that Jabez was removing a full half inch of potato with the



skin, she felt that the limit of extravagance had been reached.

At the Brimblecom farm a generous meal was served, and Jabez wondered how long he could patiently subsist upon the diminutive feasts which graced Sabriny's table.

One morning, when he began to think that patience was ceasing to be a virtue, Sabriny announced that she was going down town to do a few errands.

"All right," Jabez replied, cheerfully. "I'll spend the time whilst ye're aout er writin' er letter ter er friend up home." And as soon as he was alone, Jabez sat down to write the promised letter to Silas Barnes. His merry eyes were twinkling, his shrewd mouth was puckered as if about to whistle, and sometimes he chuckled as his letter described some of the events of his visit. And when the letter reached the village store it found an eager audience awaiting it. Indeed, the curious group which habitually lounged about the place had begun to think that Jabez Brimblecom had forgotten his



promise, when one morning Silas Barnes, while sorting the mail, paused and waved one letter aloft.

"Hurrah fer Jabez!" he cried. "I guess we're all 'baout ready ter hear from him, an' I'll stop right naow ter read it; the rest er the mail can wait er spell."

"That's so, Silas!"

"Give us Jabez's, an' let the others stan' er while."

"Git the onwalope off'n it, an' come over here an' read it."

"Don't ye be so rampageous," Silas drawled; "I've got the thing undid. Jabez was in er hurry, an' he didn't half lick the flap, so I only jest had ter pick it open. Naow I can't find my specs."

The eager crowd fumed while Silas searched in vest pockets and trousers pockets, on the counter, and in the desk, until Joel Simpkins shouted in triumph:

"Here they be! I faound them on top er the m'lasses barrel, within er inch er floppin' in."



"Wal, they hadn't flopped in, so ye'd needn't er mentioned it," said Silas, testily. There were times when he wished that Joel could be a little less pert. He adjusted his spectacles, and opened the letter and read:

"FRIEND BARNES:

"I was a-goin' ter tell ye that 'I naow take my pen in hand,' but I remember that I hev wrote that at the top er the page of every letter I hev ever sent ye, so I won't do it agin. I'll jest tell ye the truth; I *grabbed* the pen as soon as Sabriny had started aout ter do some arrants, an' I'm goin' ter give ye er idee er my visit.

"Fust of all, ye know Sabriny, so I needn't describe her, 'cept ter say that she's the same ticket she's allus been, only more so. Naow, knowin' her to be some pernicky-erty, an' havin' detarmined ter make er good long stay, I've sot myself to endure her notions, but it's quite er stunt.

"She ain't what ye'd call er lib'ral pervider, and le'me tell ye 'baout er dinner we



had last week. 'Twa'n't much use ter er called it dinner; they was so little of it that ye reely needn't er called it anything. They had it fixed in what Sabriny calls 'coarses,' an' some on 'em *is* coarse, an' some is so pesky fine ye can't hardly see 'em.

"Wal, fust we had some sloppy stuff in the bottom of our soup plates. They was only 'baout three spoonfuls of it, but lan' knows that was 'nough, fer it look'd like dish-water, an' tasted er jest nothin' 'tall.

"'Haow d'ye like yer soup, Jabez?' she asked.

"I didn't want ter be imp'lite an' say I didn't, so, says I: ' 'Tain't no use ter try ter tell ye whether I liked it, fer I couldn't tell the taste with *one* mouthful, an' when I took the second, 'twas all gone.' I don't wonder she called it er 'coarse'; 'twas kind er *common* tastin', I will say.

"Wal, next she fetched er big platter through the kitchen doorway. When I seen her comin' with that platter, what was 'most as big as half the table, I thought p'raps it



had somethin' onto it what was wuth eatin', but le'me tell ye! She sot that 'ere platter daown an' I jest ketched my breath. Silas, ef ye'll b'lieve me, all there was on it was the lonesomest little fish ye ever seen. Actooally, when Boardman took up the big fork an' carvin' knife it seemed coward-like ter tackle the leetle critter. Leetle as it was, Boardman managed to chop aout four pieces; that made er piece er fish fer each of us, an' one left over. That piece wa'n't much bigger'n er postage stamp, but I'll bet Sabriny 'll make at least half er gallon er chowder aout er it.

"We finished off with er pie that looked 's ef it had been sot onto, an' she cut it inter *nine* pieces. I says, says I, 'With some cal'-latin', Sabriny, ye could er cut that pie inter *ten* pieces; nine ter eat and one ter carry, as we used ter say at the deestRICT school.' Sabriny don't never see a joke, an' she jest looked at me er minute, an' then she said: 'Carry where?'

" 'Ter *meetin'* ef yer want ter!' I snapped,



fer I was pooty nigh wore aout with that dinner.

“Sabriny, when she lived ter hum, used ter wear caliker wrappers, and after she married Boardman an’ came ter visit us they wasn’t *wrappers*, they was tea-gaowns. Naow she wears things she calls matty-nees, and they look like night-gowns. I told her that, an’ she said:

“ ‘Naow, Cousin Jabez, I wish ye hadn’t such idees. This ’ere matty-nee is reely el’gant!’ I didn’t say ’twa’n’t; what’s the use?

“Boardman has had one er his tur’ble big-feelin’ days agin. Not but he allus feels big ’nough, but oncet in er while he gits puffed up, an’ then he prances raound an’ uses sech big words that ye can’t tell what he’s a-drivin’ at. He commenced the fust thing this mornin’; woke up with the idee that he’d got ter use some big words er bust.

“ ‘Good mornin’! Good mornin’!’ he screeched. ‘Hev ye noticed the air? I rose with the sun this mornin’, and the air is so



rary-fyin' that I feel 's ef I could fly ef I tried.'

" 'Fer massy sakes, don't try!' says I. 'Ye hop raound naow like er hen with er red rag on her leg!'

" 'Don't the eff'vesence er the ozone go racin' through yer system?' he asked.

" 'Gosh! No, I *hope* not,' says I, an' after er talkin' er lot more nonsense 'bout the sun an' the dew, the mornin' zephyrs an' sich, he went daown taown, an' I was glad of it. I'm some pleased ter hev five minutes ter myself, fer I don't admire Sabriny's husband, an' I don't love Sabriny as I s'pose I'd oughter, bein's she's my cousin, an'—I was goin' to write 'bout some er her pecoolarities, but she's just come in, an' she's hollerin' 'Jabez! Jabez!' so I'll go see what she wants.

" I guess ye may tell the folks I'm talkin' er comin' home soon, an' with regards to all on 'em.

" I'm yours fer luck,

" JABEZ BRIMBLECOM."



Roars of laughter greeted the quaint, characteristic letter. It was as if Jabez had been with them, relating his experiences during his visit, and describing Sabriny's whims. Jabez had spelled his letter as he would have pronounced it, and Silas Barnes had read it in a manner which had shown its droll points to the best advantage.

"I guess I'll hev ter be packin' my carpet-bag, Sabriny," Jabez remarked one morning. Sabriny tried to hide her emotion, but her relief and delight were very evident in her voice as she said:

"Ye ain't thinkin' er leavin' us, be ye?"

"Wal, yes; I guess so," Jabez replied. "I guess Mis' Brimblecom would like ter see me, an' without critersizin' *your* cookin' I mus' say I'm hankerin' fer some er hern. Ye mus'n't take on, though," he continued, "fer before ye kin turn raound like as not I'll be writin' ter say I'm comin' agin. Ye see, Sabriny, ev'ry time ye visit us I'll come an' return the visit, an' mebbe sometimes I'll stay with ye longer'n ye stay with us."



"I shouldn't wonder ef I'd better stay in the city altogether," Sabriny answered. "I seem ter think that the air agrees with me."

"Jest as ye like," said Jabez; "but remember I feel reel friendly, an', as I said, I'll return ev'ry visit ye make. Ef ye stay with us in the summer, I'll come prompt ter spend the early fall with ye. An' one thing I'll promise ye: ye won't be bothered with wond'rin' haow ter make the time fly, fer I'll find chores 'nough ter keep yer busy the hull time. Ye kin feed hens er hogs, I don't keer which, an' ye kin hoe pertaters; they do say hoein' is reel healthy, er ye kin pick pertater bugs, an' they's allus weedin' ter fall back onter when ye do'no' what else ter do."

Sabriny's face was a study. Anger, disgust, impatience, were alternately displayed, and when she spoke her words filled Jabez with delight.

"I shouldn't wonder ef I stayed right here in this 'ere flat fer years, 'thout even *lookin'* at the country," she said.



## CHAPTER VIII

### A FAMILIAR FACE

IT was with light footsteps that Randy sped along the shady road toward home. She had wondered if Matthew Langdon would advise her, if he would be interested; now she believed that no one could have been more kind than he had been. He would help her, and she, with his guidance, would accomplish so much that later she would return to Aunt Prudence with the delightful news that competent help had been hired, and that the farm was truly flourishing.

She wondered if Dave Skinner and his wife would insist upon staying. They had so often told of all which the place lacked, of what an unattractive farm it was to live upon, that one might think that they would be very glad to obtain another position.



Randy's questionings were answered as soon as she reached home. She laid her hand upon the gate and paused to look at the tall clump of phlox which seemed to flourish in spite of neglect. She heard voices from behind the clambering vines, where the open kitchen window was nearly concealed by leafage.

"Wal, I ain't goin' ter stay here 'nother day. I'm what they calls a expert farmer, an' you're good 'nough cook fer anybody, an' I say we'd ought ter take the sitiuation."

"But Randy 'd think we was jest pesky mean ef we didn't stay an' give her notice."

"An' while we're waitin' ter do that we'll lose the chance we're offered. Six dollars a week an' faound ain't picked off'n ev'ry bush."

"Wal, I s'pose you kin tell her we want ter git aout, an' see what she says."

Randy hastened up the walk. A day before she would not have known what to do; now she had no cause to hesitate.

As she opened the door, Dave Skinner



sneaked out into the back garden, leaving his wife to tell Randy as much, or as little, as she chose. She was wondering how to begin, when Randy spared her the task of deciding by saying:

“I was coming up the walk, and I could not help hearing what you were saying. How soon would you like to go?”

Her manner was so calm, and the question so unexpected, that Mrs. Skinner turned quickly about to look at Randy, while her reply was but an ejaculation.

“Wal, for the land's sake!”

“I heard Mr. Skinner say that he was sure that the place which had been offered him was much better than this, and you need stay here but a few days.”

It was not strange that Mrs. Skinner was surprised. She had thought of telling Randy of their intention of leaving, and she had expected tears and remonstrance. As it was, Randy had overheard the conversation and appeared to be willing, even eager, for their departure.



At once the situation changed. Dave Skinner and his wife began to wonder if, after all, the new place would have the attractions of the one they now held.

Randy did not demand an immediate statement as to what they would do, because she did not know what plans Matthew Langdon might wish to make, or how long it might be before a man could be found who could assume the care of the farm, or a suitable woman for the home.

She had happy dreams that night, however, for was not Mr. Langdon coming in the morning, and had he not looked sufficiently brave and strong to cope with difficulties which to her looked unconquerable?

Those who were pretending to care for the farm had refused to listen to the voice of a girl.

Matthew Langdon was a man of his word. He had said that he would arrive promptly, and Randy believed that she would see him coming up the walk early in the forenoon.



At daybreak the sound of voices in the garden awakened her. She glanced at the tiny clock upon her bureau.

"Six o'clock," she whispered. "Who would be out in the garden at this time?"

She knew that upon her father's large farm the men were at work long before six, but Dave Skinner and his wife declared that hour to be too early, and never arose until an hour and a half later. Could they be hastening their departure? Were they sneaking away before she came down to breakfast?

She arose and hastened toward the window, keeping behind the muslin curtain that it might screen her. Truly, it was a surprising scene which she beheld. In the gateway stood Matthew Langdon, apparently to oversee the work which was being done. Two sturdy youths were weeding the garden beds which bordered the walk, while a man was trimming the vines which overhung the doorway.

"Look aout, Jim! Them 'ere pusleys has



got ter come up, but don't yank them 'sturtiums 'long with 'em," directed Matthew; then to the other boy he shouted another order.

"Don't leave any one er them sorrels; they'll choke them larkspurs all ter pieces. I say! Leave some er them vines ter the left, an' slip er few pieces of them lippy ones on the other side er the doorway. Soon's ye've finished here we'll set to an' get ev'ry weed out'n the pertater patch; they's more weeds 'n pertaters naow, but I guess er leetle decent work will set the plants er-goin'."

A window flew open, pushed upward by a hasty hand. A frowsy head was thrust out, while its owner shouted:

"Here! What yer doin'?"

Matthew Langdon looked toward the occupant of the window.

"Tarnin' over a new leaf," he said.

"Do'no' what yer mean, but ye've no right ter be doin' nothin' here."

"Much right as ye hev," Langdon replied, "fer I ain't chargin' nothin', an' ye've been



receivin' wages fer doin' nothin' fer some time, so I've heared."

"We've had all we want on't, me 'n' Mis' Skinner," was the sullen answer.

"Ye can't git aout any sooner'n I'd like," snapped Langdon; "fer, as I said, I'm er tarnin' over a new leaf, an' it won't be flopped back, neither. I ain't goin' ter ask yer ter hurry, but I tell ye naow, ye couldn't git aout any too quick to please me."

In lieu of an answer the window was closed with a bang.

Dave Skinner had had dealings with Matthew Langdon, and knew him to be a determined man, who might be expected to complete any work which he had undertaken. He held a hasty interview with his wife, with the result that they decided to accept immediately the position which had been offered them upon a distant farm. Their belongings were few, and when all their worldly possessions had been crowded into a capacious carpet-bag they hastened from the house by the rear door, leaving a



hastily scrawled note upon the table, which read as follows:

“dear Miss Randy,

“i an’ my wife is sum in a hurry, an’ we hev gone ’cause Matthew kin do oll the wurk he wants ter, ’thout me bein’ raound. i ain’t done eny things he will be sayin’ i done, so good-bi fer the present.

“Yours ter command,

“DAVE SKINNER.”

When, having read this unique note, Randy hastened out to show it to Matthew Langdon, she was surprised at the manner in which he received it.

“So Dave has writ a letter, has he? Wal, let’s see what he says.” He adjusted his glasses and slowly read the note.

“So he ain’t done any er the things I’ll be sayin’ he’s done. Wal, ef he’s got ter begin naow tellin’ what he *ain’t* done, it mus’ be ’baout time fer me ter be lookin’ raound ter see what he’s *did*.”



“ And you're not sorry that he hastened? ”  
Randy questioned.

“ Wal, I guess *not*. I took the lib'ty ter 'ngage one er the best couples ye ever seen, an' as they'll be here day after ter-morrer, they'll jest fill the bill. He's er good, smart feller, that'll keep things hummin', an' his wife's jest the beater-ee fer haousekeepin'. As I said, they'll be here day after ter-morrer, an' I'm ter invite yer ter come up ter my haouse ter stop over Sunday. Bein' a old bach, I ain't got a reel home ter ax ye ter, but Dorcas, my haousekeeper, told me the last minute as I was goin' aout the gate ter be sure ter invite yer.

“ ‘ Don't ye fergit it, Matthew,’ says she, ‘ ef ye hev ter say it over all the way there. Jest keep repeatin', ‘ I'm goin' ter ax Randy ter *my* haouse, I'm goin' ter ax Randy ter *my* haouse.’ Wal, all the way 'long I kep er sayin' of it, till somehow I got it skewed, an' fust thing I know'd I was singin' :

“ ‘ I'm goin' ter ax Randy ter *my* haouse, I'm goin' ter ax Mandy ter *ry* haouse,’ an'



the boys I brung 'long with me was laughin' fit ter kill."

Randy sat down upon the grass and laughed until the tears ran down her cheeks. The picture of the tall, fine-looking, elderly man swinging along the road to the rhythm of the lines which he had been enjoined to repeat, and the comical "skew" which he had given them, was irresistibly droll.

Dorcas Dinsmore was a "character," said her friends and neighbors, and Matthew Langdon was wont to declare that that oft-repeated statement had led him to choose her for his housekeeper.

"She was some odd, an' a sight diff'rent from any er the other women what wanted the place, an' thinkin' she'd make er leetle vari'ty in my way er livin', I took her."

"And she *did*, didn't she?" was the invariable question, which always received an affirmative answer. And when the work for the day was done, Randy walked along the road which led toward the Langdon home-



stead, thankful that the kind friend had spared her the loneliness of a day and night at the little farm.

"Ye'll like Dorcas, I guess, when ye see what a character she is," Matthew said. "She's allus er doin' er sayin' the thing ye least expect. I hired her jest ter let her put er leetle vari'ty inter my way er livin'."

"And did she?" Randy questioned, from a wish to please him, rather than from curiosity.

"Wal, naow, she did, an' she's kep' it up. She 'rived ter my haouse on a Thursday, an' upsot all my cal'lations by sayin' that we couldn't hev no salt cod on Friday. Naow, I didn't so much keer, only we'd had salt cod ev'ry Friday sence I could remember, an' I'd er said nothin' but er cyclone could er made me eat anything else. Haowsomever, Dorcas made a hash er beet an' pertaters, an' I noticed two things, I eat it, an' nothin' queer happened. One day, after she'd been at the haouse er few weeks, she says, says she:



“ ‘ Mr. Langdon, ef ye’ve no objections, I guess I’ll change a few things hereabouts.’ ”

“ I says: ‘ Change ’em ef you want ter; I do’no’s I mind.’ ”

“ ‘ Wal,’ Dorcas said, ‘ ye’re gettin’ inter ruts, an’ ter git ye aout I’ll turn the program hin’ side to. I’ll go aout Monday an’ make a few calls. Tuesday I’ll bake, Wednesday I’ll use fer readin’ an’ improvin’ my mind, Thursday I’ll wash, Friday I’ll iron, Sat’d day I’ll mend, and Sunday’ll jest make a hyphen between. We’ll make the haouse-keepers raound here stare, fer they’ve washed of a Monday, ironed Tuesday, an’ so on, just opposite my way, all their lives. I’ll give ’em a new idee, but that won’t hurt ’em, an’ this ’ere haousehold won’t be forever runnin’ in ruts.’ ”

They had reached the gate, and between the rows of nodding blossoms and the tall shrubbery which bordered the path Randy saw a slender, wiry woman coming to greet her.

“ I remembered ter bring Randy with me,



Dorcas, an' she'll stay with ye till Monday," Matthew announced.

"I'm glad ter see ye, Miss Randy, glad we're ter hev ye with us," Dorcas Dinsmore said, as she grasped Randy's hand, at the same time viewing her with evident approval.

"Come right in with me, while Matthew does a few chores, an' we'll hev a little time 'fore supper." They went into the cheery sitting-room where, from the window, they could see Matthew hurrying in and out of the great barn, evidently trying to put everything in perfect order before dark.

"He's a good man's ever I see, an' now't I've got some er the ruts an' notions out'n him, he's well-nigh perfection. One idee he had was that baked beans was the thing ter hev Sat'day night an' Sunday mornin', but I fixed that by makin' Tuesday night an' Wednesday mornin' the bean days er the week. Tickled him jest tremenjous; said he felt's ef he was er free man at last, bein's he'd allus had sartain things on the self-



same day er the week, 'cause his fam'ly had. Naow he has them things on *other* days, he actooally draws er long breath. But tell me, naow, I heard ye was eddicated in Bosting, an' know 'most ev'rything; is that true? "

Randy laughed merrily.

" I'll have to say yes and no," she said. " After I was graduated from the school in our town, I had a delightful winter in Boston, where I was a pupil at a fine private school, but as to knowing everything, I have never reached that point, and I surely never shall."

" Wal, I do'no'," the woman replied, " with all that schoolin' seems 's if there couldn't be much more to learn."

When later they sat about the tea-table Randy was amused by another dissertation in which Dorcas again expressed her peculiar views regarding education.

" Ef ye want ter say, Miss Randy, that ye ain't learned all there is ter be learned, ye must hev got all anybody needs ter know,



so's extry schoolin' would be jest puttin' on fancy work, like addin' flourishes ter plain writin', that looked well 'nough jest as 'twas."

"Dorcas speaks as if she despised flourishes, but she's got a new bunnit ter wear ter church ter-morrer, an' I'll bet she couldn't be hired to wear her ol' bunnit, that's 'nough sight plainer," chuckled Matthew.

"They's some difference between eddication and bunnits," Dorcas rejoined, with spirit.

"So there is, so there is," Matthew said, "an' they's a mighty sight er difference in bunnits. That new one er yourn, Dorcas, is er beauty."

"It's no use gittin' vexed with Matthew, Miss Randy, fer he's allus ready to pour ile on the troubled waters. He knew that compliment fer my bunnit would fetch me."

"Dorcas says that so's ye won't notice one er her good p'int, an' that is that she can't keep mad er minute," said Matthew.



An amusing evening followed tea. Randy forgot that she had been homesick but a few hours before, for the tales which Matthew told of his youth were full of adventure, and Dorcas recounted happenings during her own schooldays to which her small audience eagerly listened. In return, Randy told of her visit to Boston, of the fine music to which she listened, the brilliant parties which she attended, and, at their urgent request, described Helen Dayton's beautiful home.

"'Most a palace, wasn't it?" questioned Matthew.

"It seemed a palace to me," Randy said, "for I had never seen anything finer than a comfortable farmhouse."

"Must 'a' looked turrible plain when ye came back from the city," ventured Dorcas.

"The city was grand, and I shall always remember the delightful time spent there. It was exciting, and I wish I might often visit there, but for my home I'd choose these



New England hills. If the city is vast and stately, it cannot laugh at our sunny valleys, for they are full of a beauty that the city can never boast, while I feel that in our hills there is a grandeur that no human hand could build."

No one could doubt the deep, true love and admiration which Randy felt for her native hills. Her eyes were shining, her cheeks flushed a soft pink. She had spoken vehemently. She had felt all that she had said.

"That's a 'mazin' pooty speech, Randy, an' ye said it 'most as fine as the minister could; I do'no' but finer," Matthew said. He was delighted to find a girl whose pretty head had not been turned by the glitter of the city; who loved her country home so truly that she saw its beauties, and was eager to tell of them.

"An' speakin' er the minister, ye'll hev er chance to hear him ter-morrer. He's er likely young man, full er vim an' en'gy, an' right after the fellers what goes ter church



but ain't reely doin' any good in the community."

Sunday morning came with sun and cheer. Along the road the sunbeams and shadows played, while by the rambling stone walls the grass nodded in the breeze, parting to show here and there a gay little wild flower. As they jogged along behind the brown mare, Matthew held the reins in a firm grasp, and devoted his attention to her as closely as if she had been a mettlesome creature, who was liable, at any moment, to bolt, while Dorcas chatted volubly of the church, the sewing society, the missionary society, and other similar topics in which she felt a deep interest. It never occurred to her that Randy was taking no part in the conversation, and, indeed, Randy herself was unaware of her own inattention, until suddenly awakened by a question from Dorcas:

"Don't ye think that's a good idee, Miss Randy?"



Randy blushed in confusion. In spite of a determination to listen attentively to Dorcas's lengthy discourse, her thoughts had traveled over many miles, and she had, for the time, been with little Prue at home.

"I guess ye didn't hear the plan I was tellin' ye 'baout the Women's Missionary 'Sociation was makin', an' I can't tell it over agin, fer here we be at the church."

"Oh, I am sorry I seemed inattentive," Randy hastened to say; "I was a bit homesick this morning, and I was thinking of home when you spoke to me."

"That's all right," Dorcas whispered, as they entered; "like 'nough ye couldn't help yer thoughts a-wool-gatherin'. I kin tell all over agin 'nother time."

The little church was quaint in design, and but sparsely decorated. Randy watched the people as they entered. They were in appearance much like the little congregation at home. Over by a window sat a couple so like Jabez Brimblecom and his wife that



Randy felt as if she was looking at familiar friends, and she smiled as she watched a wriggling row of children in one of the pews near the pulpit. They reminded her of the little Buffums, whose mother vainly strove to keep them in order, although threats and entreaties failed to induce them to sit still. She could not keep her mind upon the sermon.

“I am as inattentive as I used to be when I was a little girl,” she thought, and she strove to give heed to the sermon, but the young minister’s flight of eloquence had led him away from his text, and again Randy studied those about her.

A little girl turned around and, leaning over the back of the pew, regarded Randy with very evident admiration. The child was charming, and Randy was so interested in her that she did not realize that the sermon was ended until the closing hymn was announced. She had seen those in the congregation who reminded her of friends and neighbors at home, although the resemblance



was but slight. There was a certain comfort in the fact that they had not been widely different from her own townspeople, and she felt less homesick.

The progress down the aisle was necessarily slow, for many who had driven to church from a distance took the opportunity to pause for a chat with their friends.

Dorcas was impatient, but one there was who was thankful for the delay. He was trying to reach Randy before she should leave the church. He was not willing to push rudely past the gossips who impeded his progress, yet why need they chat forever; could they not see that a fellow would like to leave the church *some* time?

Thus he was reasoning, when a break in the group in front of him permitted him to pass, and with eager steps he hastened forward.

"Randy," he said, at the same time lightly touching her arm.

"Why, Arthur," she said, the soft color tingeing her cheeks.



“Are you glad to see me?” His voice was eager.

“Indeed, yes; it is so good to see a familiar face among these strangers,” she replied, kindly; but that was not exactly what Arthur had wished her to say. He knew that she would thus have greeted any friend.



## CHAPTER IX

### LOYAL TO JOTHAM

ARTHUR EARNSHAW counted himself a lucky fellow. He had been sorry enough to leave his pleasant home, his sister Eunice, and the pleasures which the little town afforded, to stay for an unlimited time in a distant village as overseer, or manager, upon the vast acres of their old homestead.

He was proud that his father had thought him capable and trustworthy, and he had worked faithfully to merit approval, but that he should be so long away from the sight of Randy's lovely face seemed hard indeed, and doubly so since Jotham's vacation permitted him to remain in the village, to enjoy its few social pleasures, and—to be near Randy.

He had worked persistently, and with seemingly tireless energy, with apparently no other interest than the daily tasks which



he set for himself and for the men whom he employed.

“For a handsome chap, Mr. Arthur is the hardest worker I ever seen,” said one of the farmhands, as he paused in his work to watch his young employer.

“I know it,” responded the man to whom he had spoken; “he tells me what ter do, but he works as hard as any of us. I’ve watched him, an’ he’s no eyes for the deacon’s daughter as lives jest across the way, though, if I’m not mistaken, they’re mightily taken with him.”

“It seems queer, though, fer a young feller to be so quiet an’ serious-like,” was the response. But one day a letter from his sister Eunice had wrought such a change in Arthur that the men were amazed.

“Randy is at her Aunt Prudence’s farm, which, from what they say, must be situated about two miles from our old homestead where you are staying. See if you can find her; she will be lonely, and glad to see a friend.”



Arthur placed the letter in his pocket, murmuring, "Eunice is a sister worth having," and all the day he hummed or whistled at his work, while the light in his blue eyes was so merry that those who had called him quiet now wondered if they had been mistaken.

It was Saturday, and a very busy Saturday, too. Arthur could not, or rather would not, neglect the work which should be done. He did not know where the small farm was located, and he would not ask, lest his manner betray how deep was his interest.

He knew that the one little church sufficed for the four tiny villages in whose midst it stood, and believing that there he should see Randy, he harnessed handsome chestnut Dick and drove over to the Sunday service.

He saw her as soon as he entered the church, and watched her attentively until he could join her.

Matthew saw that Arthur was charmed with Randy, and jumped at the conclusion



that Randy was equally interested in the handsome, manly young fellow, so he urged Arthur to accept a seat in their carriage, permitting the man who had driven over with him to return with the buggy.

“Pleased ter hev ye fer er guest ter dinner, an’ it’s only a short walk ter yer own place, though ef ye like I’ll drive ye over. It’ll be just no bother at all.”

Dorcas added a word, that he might be sure of welcome, and thus it happened that the afternoon at the Langdon homestead was brightened by two young guests, who chatted gayly and delighted Matthew and Dorcas with their ready wit.

Arthur was full of spirit, and told of some amusing happenings since he had become an overseer upon his father’s property.

Not to be outdone, Randy told of her experiences as an amateur housekeeper, and joined in the merriment which her story evoked. And when, later, Arthur turned toward home, he felt bound to say that he had spent a delightful afternoon, his only



regret being that he had had not a moment alone with Randy. He had, however, promised to call at the little farmhouse some sunny day during the week, and he anticipated a pleasant chat with Randy, when, perhaps, he might learn how deep was her friendship for Jotham.

Promptly on Monday morning Matthew, with a number of helpers, was at work at the farm, and in the afternoon the couple whom he had engaged arrived. Randy saw at once that the young farmer and his buxom wife were very unlike the Skinners.

Jack Fenton was a frank, earnest young farmer, and his wife was as eager as he to make the place a success. With Matthew Langdon to superintend, what might they not accomplish?

Although Randy had been at the farm but a few weeks, she had had many callers. Mrs. Jehiel Hinks had thought it wise to give Randy the benefit of her opinions, and she had had more advice to offer than could



be given at one time. Some of the girls residing near enough to be classed as neighbors had timidly called to meet the girl who had been "educated in Bosting." They had liked and admired her, but her pretty, graceful manner was so unlike anything to which they were accustomed that they felt shy and diffident in her company.

"She's different from any of the girls here," they said.

There was one, however, who felt no shyness, who admired her, and who sought eagerly an opportunity to show his regard, and that was young Obadiah Wilson.

Thrice since their meeting he had strolled over to the farm, but he had not seen Randy.

The first time, Mrs. Skinner had chased him across lots, believing that his appearance in the neighborhood meant mischief. The second time, Dave was in the yard.

"Look here, sonny, ye make tracks fer home," and Obadiah obeyed.

The third time, Randy was entertaining



some callers; he could hear their voices as soon as he entered the gate, and great was his disgust.

"That squealy voice is Lotty Ann Cary's," he said. "I'd know it a mile off; an' that one that's so noisy is Loizy Lamson's; she always giggles 's if ev'rything was so turrible funny. I know 'em both, but I ain't goin' in. I don't like them gals, an' I don't b'lieve Randy does. Randy's the only gal I ever liked," he added, fervently, and, vaulting the fence, he hurried down the road, his little face showing his disgust.

"I'd like to know *when* I'll see her," he muttered, petulantly. The fourth attempt was more successful. Randy was in the garden, and his greeting was most unconventional.

"Hi!" he shouted, "I'm a-comin' ter see yer. Be ye glad?"

He laughed gleefully, and Randy echoed his mirth.

"Truly I'm glad to see you. I have been looking for you," she said. She was amused



at his eagerness, yet she endeavored to entertain him as earnestly as if he had been a friend of her own age. He told her of his other attempts to see her; of his joy that she was at home to-day. He described his little hunting trips, and told of the day that he went fishing, and the wonderful "catch," of everything, in fact, that had happened since the day when he had first seen her. How frank he was; how innocently he revealed his boyish admiration for her. It needed but little discernment to see that that day of days on which they first had met had cast a golden haze over every following event. Randy watched his bright little face, and listened with interest to all that he had to say.

She was a girl who could fully enjoy an interesting friend of her own age, yet had enough of the glad child nature within her to make her a rare companion for the little ones who so dearly loved her.

She did not talk to the boy as if she were trying to assume an interest which she did



not feel. She was *sincerely* interested, and she let him see and feel it. She had been gathering some flowers, and she bent to place a blossom in the button-hole of his little jacket, when a merry whistle caused them both to turn. It was a familiar song, and one which Eunice Earnshaw often begged Janie McLeod to sing.

A smile of welcome parted Randy's lips; a frown of disapproval bent the small boy's brows.

"Is he comin' here?" he asked.

"Yes, he is an old friend," she said.

"But I'm a new one, ain't I?" he questioned; "an' this is *my* call, fer I got here fust."

"But may he not come, too? You would not wish me to send him away."

Obadiah thought he would, but did not like to say so, and while he was trying to think how to answer, Arthur entered the garden. As he swung the gate open, the small boy darted past him and out.

"Hello, my boy! What's your hurry?"



said Arthur, to which, with an amazing lack of courtesy, Obadiah replied:

“I ain’t yer boy, an’ I’m in er hurry ’cause ye spoilt my call; ’tain’t fair.”

Then across the fields he ran, paying no heed to Randy’s voice, which urged him to return.

Share his call with a tall rival? *Never!*

“Queer little chap,” Arthur said, as he looked at the receding figure, flying across the field. “I wonder why he rushed off in such haste?”

“He refused to share his call with you,” Randy said, her eyes twinkling merrily; “he considered you an interloper.”

“Older fellows have just such notions sometimes. Odd, isn’t it?” he asked.

Randy ignored the question.

“Obadiah was too hasty; there surely was room for three in this garden,” she said.

It was Arthur’s turn to ignore, so he expressed a fervent desire to remain in the garden, rather than to spend the sunny afternoon indoors. He told her of his work



upon his father's place, of his letters from Eunice, and the items of news which they contained. He seemed a different person from the Arthur Earnshaw whom she had known at home. She was surprised at his fund of information, at his ready wit, his quick repartee. Why had he ever seemed to her a quiet fellow?

Arthur little dreamed of what she was thinking. He could easily have answered the question which puzzled her.

In their own village Randy was a great favorite. No other girl was so beloved by old and young. Equally popular was Jotham, her staunch friend, and Arthur Earnshaw, unwilling to be *one* of her friends, sought selfishly to monopolize her attention. In a country village everyone is interested in everybody's business, and Arthur knew that his course was not approved. He was, therefore, often self-conscious and ill at ease.

Here, at this little farmhouse, the field was his. The thought filled him with ex-



citement, and in a spirit of daring he made an attempt to render his own position even more secure.

They had been talking of their friends at home, and Randy had said that the farm was now under such perfect management that she should soon be able to return.

Arthur could never remember exactly how it happened; but in some manner Randy referred to Jotham, and, like a flash, the foolish jealousy which had been slumbering awoke.

"I don't know why you prize his friendship so highly."

His voice was harsh, and seemed unlike his own. Randy turned in surprise.

"Because he is a friend worth having," she said, quietly.

"He is no truer friend than I," he said, his quick temper getting the better of his usually good judgment.

She looked at him, surprised at his hasty manner, while he, unable to read her thoughts, blundered on.



"You do not *know* how true a friend he may be," he said, his voice ringing out sharply. "I can tell you he is no truer friend than I."

"He is a far truer friend than you; truer to me, and to you." She had risen from the low garden seat, and had moved toward him, and Arthur thought that she had never looked so beautiful, but his anger, his jealousy, would not permit him to remain silent.

"Truer to you? How could that be? And as to being truer to me——" He lifted his hands and let them drop, as if deprecating the idea. In an instant he heartily wished that he had not said the words, for now Randy was angry.

"Yes, truer to you, in that he never spoke of you in other than a kindly manner. He is too genuinely true, too manly to talk against my friends to me. He would never think thus to please me."

"Oh, Randy, I have blundered——"

"You have, indeed," she said.

"I'd better go, now."





She had risen from the low garden seat, and had moved toward him. — *Page 174.*







"Yes," she agreed, but so gently did she speak that he knew that her anger had fled, and in its place was regret, genuine regret, that he should have done so unworthy a thing.

"I'm sorry," he said, in almost a whisper, "and I'll come again when I am calmer, and can speak so kindly of my friends that I shall *appear* like the gentleman that I *am*."

Randy nodded assent. She felt that she had nothing to say, and she remained standing by the garden seat long after Arthur was out of sight. Then she turned toward the house and, entering the little sitting-room, sat down to think over this new phase in Arthur's character.

Truly he had surprised her, for he had always appeared to be all that was honorable and sincere, yet he had taken advantage of Jotham's absence to speak in a most unfriendly manner of him.

"He was neither kind nor true," she said. Arthur, as he hurried homeward, thought



of his hasty words, and earnestly wished that he might have recalled them.

"She was loyal to an absent friend; what a coward she must think me," he whispered, to which the wind through the leaves seemed to whisper:

"Hush—sh, hush—sh."

He listened to their soft music, and it seemed to calm and comfort him.

"I'll win her regard; I'll prove myself worthy of her respect," he thought; and to his fancy the leaves seemed to murmur:

"Yes—s; yes—s."

That night he spent in restless tossing upon his pillow, and in his dreams he saw again Randy's truthful eyes, not angry, but reproachful, looking at him as she had looked that afternoon.



## CHAPTER X

### THREE LETTERS

“A GOOD-MORNIN’ ter ye, Miss Randy, an’ here’s two letters that my husband jist brought from the office,” said the cheery-faced little housekeeper, as she pointed to two envelopes which lay upon the table.

“It is a fine morning, truly,” Randy answered, “and fine luck, too, to find letters from home waiting to be opened.”

Mrs. Fenton still stood in the doorway, smoothing the folds of her stiffly starched apron, while, with an exaggerated effort to appear indifferent, she watched Randy and wondered if the letters contained good news.

She saw a bright smile part the red lips, the merry twinkle in the clear gray eyes, and thus assured, departed for the kitchen, gladdened by the thought that the girl whom she already loved had cheering letters to read.



Without pausing to examine the writing upon the envelope, Randy opened the one which lay nearest her hand. Small wonder that she looked amused. The first hasty glance at the opening lines had made it unnecessary to look for the signature.

“DEAR RANDY:

“I haven't had a spare minute since you've been away to set down and write ye a line, fer as ye well know 'tain't a pen that's usually in my hand; 'most always it's a spoon or a rolling-pin, and I ain't sure that my writing wouldn't look 'most as well if I'd used a spoon and a little molasses to do my letter-writing with. 'Twould been rather slow drying, but 'twould have made a *sweet* letter.

“And now for the news, of which there's quite a batch. Sandy McLeod's bought a new hoss, no horse (I ain't forgotten *all* I learned at the deestric school), and him and his wife looks fine riding 'round town with that high-stepping critter.



“The Hodgkineses has built a bran-fired new barn, 'nough sight bigger'n the house, and Mis' Hodgkins said the racket of the hammers interfered with her housework and made her so fidgety that she had to keep out of the house. That made us laugh. She don't most usually need a excuse fer news-gathering.

“Hi Babson found a five-cent piece right in the middle of the road. The joke was that jest as Hi came 'round the corner Josiah Boyden came down the road. Him and Hi 'spied the nickel at the very same moment. Ye know what a mint of money Josiah's got, and ye know how mean he is, too. Wal, he declared that he seen it 'fore Hi did, and he was as mad as a bear when Hi kept it.

“‘Don't keer what yer seen!’ says Hi, ‘findin's havin’, and I *found* it, so I've *got* it,’ and he ran off with it. Wasn't that Josiah, all over? With all his money, he's as eager for a nickel as a small boy.

“My cousin Jerushy's baby is 'special



bright, so she says, and I s'pose we must b'lieve it's true, but I won't feel sure until she's said somethin' besides 'da, da.' Jerushy says that's wonderful, but every child that ever I seen has made that same remark fer a fust beginning, so I ain't as impressed as I might be.

"Yer pa and ma is feeling fine, and yer Aunt Prudence is as lively as a cricket, while Prue is just what she always is, a genuine sunbeam ter be with. As fer me, I am as ever,

"Yer true friend,

"PHILURY FLANDERS.

"P. S.—Prue is at the other end of the table, a-writing a letter ter send by the same mail. Ef Joel Simpkins lets the mail-bag alone, and Silas Barnes has the sending of it off, these letters ought ter reach ye to-morrer night.

"PHILURY."

This droll letter, with its bits of neighborhood news, amused Randy, and she read it through twice before laying it down.



The second letter was from Eunice Earnshaw, and a very gentle, tender letter it was, assuring Randy of her affection for her, telling her how all her friends were longing for her return, and expressing the hope that Arthur might often be a welcome caller at the little farmhouse.

The quick color flushed Randy's cheeks as she thought of the afternoon when Arthur Earnshaw had so far forgotten himself as to have spoken slightly of an absent friend. Evidently he had not told Eunice of his ungenerous act.

"I will not tell her," Randy thought, determined to be as loyal to one friend as to another. She was wondering why Prue's letter had not arrived in company with the other two, when again the housekeeper hurried into the sitting-room.

"I brought ye two letters," she said, "an' naow here's 'nother one. My husband jest faound it in his pocket. He says he thought the postmaster give him two, an' he dumped 'em inter his pocket, but seems 'twas three,



an' here's the extry one. I hope it's as cheerful as the others, Miss Randy."

"It's the best of all; it is from my little sister, Prue."

Tears filled her eyes as she opened the envelope and glanced at the childish writing. But the uneven penmanship could not conceal the loving nature of the little sister. She had treasured what she considered the most interesting bits of news, but upon each page could be read the evidence of her love for Randy.

Prue had written the letter very neatly, and had asked how many of the words should be spelled, but about others she had felt so sure that she had not questioned their spelling, and original work she had made of it. To punctuation she had given never a thought.

"DEAR RANDY:

"It seems a norful long time to wait til you come back an' ma says you will most sirtinly come soon Johnny Buffum has got



his hare cut an' he looks so funny you would not know him The barber man cut one side long an the other side short an when he tries to make a parth the hare stans on end Hi Babson says Johnny looks like time an I do'no' how time looks but Johnny is a site One of Tabby's new kittins got into Philury's milk pan an staid there to drink when she saw the kittin she fished it out but I gess it had drank al it wanted too Missis Hodgkins was up here this mornin' an' you'd ort ter heard what she'n Aunt Prudence said.

“Aunt Prudence had on her new caliko dress an Missis Hodgkins said thats a pretty dress dont you think yor stravagant to wear it round the house Would you slect the skool or the church to wear it round Aunt Prudence asked I meant ortent you to save it and keep it kinder nise seein it cost twelv cents a yard Missis Hodgkins asked To bad for you to be so fidgity bout it longs you dont have to pay for it Aunt Prudence said and Missis Hodgkins didnt



look mad til Filury gigled then she called Philury real flipant whats flipant I asked but ma said I didnt need to no *Why* dont I need to know most everything I ask about I asked Joel Simpkins why he put oil on his hare and he said for instanse Whats instanse is it some other kind of greese Id like to be a big girl like you some day and pa says I will and Johnny Buffum says Im the same size I was to years ago Johnny is povokin

“Your loving little

“PRUE.

“P. S. Theres some little pink flowers in the spaces in the rock down side of the road to the Senter and Ill get some for you and send them in my next letter the rock is pretty hi but I can get down the side holding on to the edges and the pink flowers will be lovely to send next time

“With more love

“PRUE.”



Randy read the amusing little letter twice through without seeing its postscript, because Prue had covered three sides of the huge blue-ruled paper, signing her name at the bottom of the third page. Then she had turned it over and had written the postscript upon the fourth page. The graphic description of Johnny Buffum's unique hair-cut, of the exploration of the milk-pan by Tabby's kitten, of the little spat between Aunt Prudence and Mrs. Hodgkins, and, last of all, her wail that she could not understand why she was so often told that she did not need to know those things about which she was curious, was so like Prue that it seemed as if she had been present, plying Randy with questions which were difficult to answer.

Randy laughed as she thought how often the little sister had stood waiting for an answer to an unanswerable question. "I wonder which was most puzzled," she thought, "Prue with her questions or I trying to find answers for them."



She thought of the day when, having scolded Johnny roundly for pulling Tabby's tail, she had tried to find a reason for excusing his offense.

"If Johnny doesn't *know* it's naughty to pull Tabby's tail, *is* he naughty? Her tail is fastened on real tight, for it didn't even rip, 'though she just hollered as if she didn't like it 'tall."

A sound of wheels, followed by a loud "Whoa!" announced the arrival of a caller. It proved to be Matthew Langdon, and laying her letters upon the table, Randy hastened down the path to greet him. He was going to the village, and on the way had paused to learn if the new housekeeper and her husband were still as satisfactory as when he had last seen Randy.

"Though I hardly need ask," he said, "fer the farm looks fine from one end ter t'other, an' from the door I kin ketch er glimpse of er row er tin pans I could see my face in if I wanted ter. I allus say that er woman that keeps her tins shinin' is likely



ter hev a few other things in the haouse that'll match 'em. Was ye 'ntendin' ter do any arrants?" he asked; "'cause ef ye be, I'd be glad ter take ye fer yer pleasant comp'ny, an' fetch ye back."

Yes, Randy had that morning promised to visit the village store and purchase some household goods which were needed, and she gladly accepted the invitation to ride. As they jogged leisurely along, Matthew, with rare tact, strove to learn if in every respect the new tenants at the little farm were doing exactly as Randy wished.

She was looking off across the fields, and for a moment she did not reply. He watched her furtively, and wondered at her silence, and was about to venture yet another question when she turned toward him a face so wistful that he leaned toward her, laying a kindly hand upon her arm.

"Anything 'special pestering ye, Randy? 'Cause ye well know I'm ready ter do anything ter help ye."

"Indeed, I do," she said; "but I want



something to-day which you cannot give me; I want to go home. I know that sounds childish, and indeed I have been quite brave until to-day. This is the first time that I have been truly homesick," she continued, "and I believe it was Prue's loving little letter that lessened my bravery, and made me long for home."

"An' ye say I can't do that, Randy!" he exclaimed. "Why, ye kin go *ter-day*. With such er pair er workers, the place needs little overseein', an' that little I'll gladly do fer Miss Prudence's sake. We'll miss ye, Dorcas an' me will, but ye wasn't intendin' ter stay but er few weeks longer, anyway, an' when ye look like ye do naow, I'd 'nough rather ye'd start fer home than be waitin' fer the exact day ye promised."

"Oh, you *are* kind," she said, impulsively, "and I know how willingly you would do it, but I could not have Aunt Prudence think that I ran away from the little farm because I was homesick. Plans were made for me to stay here two weeks longer. Perhaps it will



be easier than I think ; I may feel less homesick to-morrow." She turned toward him a face in which the hopeful smile was in strong contrast with the tears upon her lashes.

"Give me yer hand, Randy! Ye're er brave gal," he said, "an' ef yer stayin' pleases Aunt Prudence, it surely pleases me. Come over ter-morrer afternoon an' let Dorcas talk ter ye. She's got er knack er tellin' quaint yarns that's amusin,' an' we'll keep ye ter tea. I'll tell Dorcas ter git aout some er her best presarves, an' we'll hev er little jollification ter cheer ye. Will ye come, Randy? I'll beau ye home in great shape."

How kind he was thus to endeavor to cheer her.

"I'll surely come," she said, at the same time resolving to be a bright, cheerful guest. She would reward Matthew and Dorcas for their kindness by trying, for the time, to forget her homesickness.

It was a busy little shopping trip, for



Randy had many purchases to make, while Matthew, armed with a long list which Dorcas had given him, seemed intent upon buying the storekeeper's entire stock.

Randy well knew what a varied stock was usually to be found in a country store, consisting of but a single article of each kind, but every kind imaginable. As they entered the store the group of loungers looked up with interest.

Matthew Langdon was a prominent man in the place, while Randy's beauty caused many a villager who had seen her at church to turn now and gaze more closely at her sweet face. Matthew took the list from his capacious pocket and proceeded to read it. Dorcas had not classified the articles; she had written them as they occurred to her, and a comically arranged list it was. Matthew read it in a drawling sing-song.

"She wants er jug er m'lasses 'n er good-sized hair-brush, er box er salt, an' er spool er twist (I declare, she's fergot to say what color, so gimme *anything*), ef Dorcas wants



twist she's goin' ter hev it er I'll git er twist, an' 'twon't be on er spool, neither; half-dozen pie-plates, an' 'leven yards er unbleached cotton, er paound er washin' powder, an' er ball er wickin', er package er starch, an' er pattern er yer newest caliker; I guess that's all."

While the order was being filled, Randy, in the doorway, looked off across the winding road with its rambling stone wall, across the fields, and yet farther to the hills upon whose rugged sides the sunlight lay, and knew that beyond, yes, far beyond them, lay home—home and those dear ones whom she longed to see. In spite of Matthew Langdon's kindness, of Arthur's many calls, of the girls of the neighborhood who had come often to see her, the stay at the farm had been unquestionably dull, and it had indeed required courage to stay the number of weeks which she had promised.

While Matthew reread his list, to see that nothing had been omitted, he peeped over his glasses, thus furtively watching until



he should be ready to make the return trip. At last the bundles were stored in the wagon, and the mare, well knowing that the road lay homeward, made better speed than when they had started out.

Matthew knew that Randy was usually the gayest of company, and that her pre-occupied manner was but evidence that her homesickness was beyond concealment. He wisely refrained from questioning her, and at the gate helped her to alight, at the same time reminding her that Dorcas would be expecting the promised afternoon and evening.

“ I’ll be glad to come,” she said, and Matthew turned as he drove away to watch the trim figure as it hastened up the walk toward the door.

The letters lay upon the table where she had left them, and the breeze from the open window was fanning their pages. She would read them again later, she thought, and, placing them between the pages of a favorite book, that they might not be blown



away, she left the room to give some directions to Mrs. Fenton.

What a busy day it proved to be! Randy never remembered how it happened that the tasks seemed to multiply until it was late in the afternoon before she was free to read again her precious letters. And when at last the leisure moment arrived she took them from their hiding-place and went out into the garden. As she paced up and down the walk she again read Eunice's loving letter.

"Any one of the girls might have been away from our village for weeks without leaving me as lonely as I am without you." Thus Eunice wrote; and on another page Randy read:

"Prue came down to see me this morning. She came running in, her curls dancing, and her cheeks flushed. I thought she had come to do an errand, but she said that it was just a call. She sat in the old-fashioned high-back chair which stands beside the tall



clock in our sitting-room. She had her hat in her hand and sat swinging her feet. She was so unusually silent that mamma asked her what she was thinking about.

“ ‘ ‘Bout my Randy,’ she said. ‘ I missed her to-day more’n any day, an’ I kept stopping to listen to our clock, and I tell you it says “Randy! Randy!” every time it ticks. So I came down here to listen to yours, and it says the same thing, only some diff’ent. Your clock says “Ran—dy! Ran—dy! Ran—Ran—Ran—dy!” Oh, I can’t stay and listen to it,’ and she ran from the house, her little hands covering her ears. I called to her to come back, thinking that I might talk to her and cheer her, but she only shook her head and kept on running up the road toward home.”

“ Dear little Prue,” Randy whispered, as she replaced Eunice’s letter in its envelope and unfolded Prue’s, to read once more it’s loving message. Then, for the first time, she saw its hastily scrawled postscript. Randy was puzzled. What could Prue mean? The





She extended her hands and lifted her eyes in mute supplication. — *Page 195.*







road to the Centre was a level thoroughfare, with neither rock, cliff, nor boulder marring its regularity, yet the little sister spoke of tiny pink blossoms growing in its crevices. Suddenly the letter dropped from Randy's hand, and the color left her cheeks.

"The *mill-road* to the Centre!" she whispered; "the great cliff on the mill-road!"

Like a flash she recalled the pink blossoms which Jotham had once gathered there, making his way down the side of the crag and with difficulty returning with the fairy-like blooms for her. If little Prue had attempted the feat!

She extended her hands and lifted her eyes in mute supplication, for in her fear for Prue's safety her lips refused to utter the prayer which her heart sent forth to One who understands before a word is spoken. It seemed as if the power to move had left her. How long she had stood she never knew, when suddenly a wild desire to know if Prue were safe sent the color back to her cheeks, while the thought that, at all costs,



she must hasten to her lent wings to her feet. She ran toward the house, in at the open door, and through the rooms, in search of the housekeeper. At last she found her, busily engaged in mixing food for the chickens.

"Lan', Miss Randy! Ye nigh made me hop. I was jest thinkin' I'd call ye ter come an' take a look at the—fer goodness sake! What kin I do fer ye? Whatever makes ye look so?" She set down the pan of meal, and hastening to Randy laid a strong arm about her.

"There, there, somebody er suthin' has frightened ye, but ye're all right naow. Set daown an' tell me 'bout it."

But Randy could not do that.

"I cannot wait to sit and talk," she said; "I must go home to-night, and I must not waste a moment which might make it possible for me to reach the depot. Come to my room with me, and while I am dressing I'll tell you why I am in such haste."

The good woman followed Randy, her



kindly face expressing the deep concern which she felt.

And while in greatest haste Randy thrust her garments into her trunk she explained how Prue's postscript had alarmed her.

An expression of relief passed over Mrs. Fenton's face.

"Why, Miss Randy, don't let that make ye start off in such er rush," she said; "like 'nough yer little sister has fergot all 'bout it, an', anyway, there's 'nough folks there ter stop her from doin' of it. She's safe an' sound, I'll warrant ye. Why, ef ye want ter go, ye'd 'nough better wait till ter-morrer, an' start off bright an' early. See what er way ye'll git onto the train with yer whole idee that suthin's gone an' happened ter her. Mebbe in the daylight ye'd feel more cheerful."

It was useless to try to calm her, or to persuade her to wait for a morning train. She thanked the good woman for her effort to comfort her, but paused not for a moment in her hasty packing.



## CHAPTER XI

### THE RETURN

MATTHEW LANGDON proved himself to be the kind friend that he had been from the first. He said never a word of disapproval of Randy's sudden leave-taking. She had sent a hasty note to him, telling him of the postscript which had alarmed her, and of her intense longing to return to her little sister whom she feared had been injured. She had begged him to drive her to the station, and he had harnessed the horse and arrived at the door before she had finished packing.

"You must have thought me hasty and easily frightened," Randy said; "but, truly, Prue's letter has made it impossible for me to stay. I feel sure that she has been hurt, and it seemed as if she were calling for me."

Laying his rough, kindly hand upon her



arm, he looked down into her tender eyes as he said:

“Ye’re doin’ jest right, Randy, jest right, fer ye’re doin’ jest as yer lovin’ heart prompts. It may be ye’ll find Prue’s all right; ef ye do, I’ll be glad, an’ ef, as ye think, she’s been hurt, ye’ll be glad ye hurried to her. There’s two things I want yer ter remember: *Fust*, that ye needn’t give er thought ter this little farm. Fenton an’ his wife is good, cap’ble folks, an’ I’m er self-app’inted overseer of yer Aunt Prudence’s property.

“Naow, *second*, that I send this message ter her, fer her consid’ration.

“Tell her, fer me, that whether she wishes it er not, as long’s I live I shall consider her an’ her int’rests er sacred trust, an’ nothin’ could shake me f’m bein’ her pertector, even tho’ she wills it that we continoo ter live in two sep’rate haouses. Will ye tell her, Randy?”

The kind old eyes were pathetically eager, and Randy felt that she was reading the life-



story of Matthew Langdon and Aunt Prudence.

"I will tell her as soon as I reach home," she said; "you may trust me."

"I'd trust ye, as I trust her; she's one er the best women that ever lived. We was little schoolmates, an' always we've been firm friends. Ef yer Aunt Prudence had been jest er *leetle* less firm, we'd er been somethin' more."

When they had reached the station they found that the train was late, and as they stood upon the platform, awaiting its arrival, they were silent, each occupied with thoughts which filled their minds; the one dreaming of the elder Prudence, the other of little Prue.

Now, as she sat looking out from the window at the twilight, as the train sped over the road, she thought of his earnest, kindly eyes and his parting words:

"Remember my message to Prudence."

"I will," she had replied.

There was little sleep for Randy during



the night. She lay back against the high-cushioned car-seat and closed her eyes, only to open them and gaze out into the night, to see if in the darkness there might appear a familiar outline of forest or mountain to tell her that she was nearing home. She believed that she could not sleep, yet sleep must have overtaken her, for when she again looked from the window daylight was dawning, and there against the sky was the silhouette of the hills whose rugged beauty she had loved and admired since childhood. A mist softened near objects and partly obscured those which were distant, but it was now becoming a golden mist, for the first rays of the rising sun were warmly gilding it.

And now the distant hills were purple in the morning sunshine. The world was, after all, a cheery place. She was nearing home; it might be that she would find Prue safe and well. She looked again from the window; she was passing through the next town to her own. Her excitement and her eager-



ness to reach home increased. She leaned forward, clasping and unclasping her hands. Now they were in her own town—yes, there were the familiar groves, the farming land, the new buildings near the Centre!

As the train slackened its speed she grasped her bag and arose from her seat before it had stopped. It was so early that there were no loiterers about the station. Telling the agent that her father would call for her trunk, she turned and hurried up the road toward home.

It seemed to Randy that the distance between the station and her home had never been so great, but at last she reached the gateway and ran up the walk, just as a farmhand came around the corner with a pail of water.

“Land er the livin’!” he exclaimed, and promptly dropped the brimming pail, regardless of the splashing water. “It’s been so lonesome here without ye, Miss Randy; I declare when I fust seen ye I thought ’twas yer ghost. They’re right in there,” he con-



tinued, pointing toward the sitting-room, as if that were the usual place in which to find the family assembled at five in the morning. Eagerly she hastened to the door.

“I want my Randy. My arm wouldn’t ache if I had my Randy.”

It was Prue’s little tearful voice.

“Here’s your Randy,” was the tender answer, and the little sister was clasped in loving arms. Prue nestled close to Randy, accepting her sudden arrival as a delightful fact, and never questioning what had occasioned her early and unexpected return. For the moment Prue had been alone, but the two voices in loving conversation had been heard by others of the family, and now they crowded about Randy, assuring her of their delight that she had returned, and plying her with countless questions.

It was as she had thought. Prue had clambered down the side of the great rock on the mill-road to gather the dainty pink blossoms which grew in its crevices. Johnny Buffum had stood below on the road, calling



to her to be careful. She had been cautious, but had missed her footing, and a root to which she had been clinging had given way and she had fallen to the ground, where she had lain until Johnny had brought assistance. She had called Randy while she was falling, at the very hour when, in Aunt Prudence's little garden, Randy had read the postscript which had so terrified her. Although not dangerously hurt, Prue's arm, which had been strained, was painful, but Mrs. Weston thought that it was almost miraculous that she was not otherwise injured.

When the excitement of her home-coming was over, Randy thought of the message intrusted to her.

Aunt Prudence and Squire Weston were talking together of the little farm and its management. Prue had fallen asleep among the cushions of the big rocking-chair, and Randy stole softly toward the window to Aunt Prudence's side.

Very gently she told the message which



Matthew Langdon had intrusted her to deliver. Did the black eyes soften? There was a tremor in the voice while she strove to speak steadily.

“I declare! That’s nigh onto the tenth time he’s said that same thing,” she said.

“Ain’t it ’bout time ter listen, then?” her brother asked, to which she evasively replied:

“Wal, I do’no’ but I hev been er leetle too sot.”

Philury was as delighted as any member of the family that Randy had returned, and loudly she proclaimed her joy. She was a most independent vocalist, manufacturing her songs and singing them in any key with utter disregard to time. She frequently boasted that she could fit her songs to any occasion, and now, while getting together her materials for baking, she lifted her voice in tumultuous, if not tuneful, song:

“Randy’s home! Seems’s if I’d fly,  
An’ my sperits soar sky high.  
Makes us glad her face ter see,  
Randy’s jest the gal fer me.”



Then silence reigned for a moment, to be broken later by another pæan of joy, sung this time to an original and wildly hilarious tune which might have been described as a musical riot.

“Jaounce the pans an’ rattle the tray!  
Randy’s home, an’ come ter *stay*!  
With such blessed news as this  
Clatterin’ dishes is er bliss!”

A crash suggested that Philury was trying to enact the last line of her song, and to prove the truth of her statement, Mrs. Weston hastened to the kitchen and found Philury upon her knees, gathering the forks and spoons which had fallen to the floor.

“I declare, Mis’ Weston, I didn’t do it er purpose, even ef I was singin’ of it. Jest as I sung ‘Clatterin’ dishes is er bliss,’ I went an’ drapped that tray, an’ the forks an’ spoons flew in every direction. ’Twa’n’t *them* I was singin’ ’baout, ’twas *dishes*.”

The glad news that Randy had returned brought friends from all parts of the town



to welcome her, and Prue was delighted when callers inquired for her injured arm. Phoebe Small talked very gently with her, for Phoebe had become a very lovable girl, kind and considerate toward her friends, and a thoughtful and affectionate daughter at home. Aunt Nabby Ware came with Agatha, and they were much amused when Prue said:

“See my arm that I hurted? An’ I have to wear it in this thing what Dr. Bushnell put on, but I’ve got my Randy with me, so I don’t care so much ’bout my arm.”



## CHAPTER XII

### LOCAL GOSSIP

AT the village store, that receptacle for all the news that floated about the county, Randy's return was hailed as a fresh topic for consideration. They wondered why she had arrived at such an early hour; if she had been homesick; if she had been sent for; or if she had returned of her own accord. Someone said that she had feared that Prue was not well, and had hastened home to care for her. This news was received with marked approval, but they then began to wonder who would run the little farm; if Aunt Prudence was going back to be her own overseer; they questioned if——but it would be impossible to enumerate the questions they asked each other, and for which no satisfactory answer could be given.

“ 'N they's 'nother craowd I'm some int'-



rested in, 'n' that's the Babsons," remarked a sturdy young farmer who had just entered.

"We see ye be," agreed a tall, lanky youth who stood near enough to the cracker barrel to help himself frequently. "We seen ye walkin' home from the meetin' haouse between Belindy an' Jemimy the last year. We've been wond'rin' which one on 'em is ter be yer ch'ice."

"Ye kin keep on wond'rin' till ye find aout," was the tart answer.

"Don't be so tetchy," the lad replied; "d'ye expect ter keep comp'ny with er couple er gals an' nobody ax er question?"

"I do'no's I do, an' I do'no' *as* I do, but one thing's sartin, I don't hev ter answer. Naow, what I was goin' ter speak of was lit-tle Hi Babson. Hi's ma thinks he's er pattern boy, but his grandmother says he's er reg'lar limb. I vum, he's no sooner aout'n one piece er mischief than he's inter 'nother. Last week he thought 'twas 'mazin' funny ter chuck er mess er milk pails daown inter



the well an' then spend the rest er the mornin' firin' stones at 'em, jest ter hear the clatter."

"Wal, that didn't beat the time he tied two er the little Buffums tergether an' ran off laughin' ter hear 'em holler. Hi didn't hurt 'em; Hi wouldn't do that. He jest tied their apron strings together, an' er madder pair er youngsters ye never see," said Nate Burnham.

Joel Simpkins felt that he had a grievance and that it was time to air it; therefore he at once took the floor.

"Speakin' er things that's aggerwatin', I kin tell ye one thing; there's my brother what *thinks* he's a genius, an' my pa-rents what's *sure* of it, an' the hull on 'em talkin' er the gret things he's er doin' of. He's makin' aout naow that he's er gret business man. He's bought er leetle piece er land 'baout big 'nough ter build er hencoop onto, an' says he'll hold it till the taown wants ter buy it of him at er high figger ter build er taown hall. Ain't that bright? When



d'ye think the taownspeople'll want er taown hall? An' when they do, air they likely ter want it over behind all the barns er the neighborhood? An' here's er pome the caounty paper printed. My brother Timotheus writ it, an' it's called

#### THE PLANTIN' ER THE CABBAGE

The cabbage seed is little  
But the cabbage head is thick;  
When the seeds is in the graound  
They'll be spraoutin' pooty quick.  
The cabbage ain't got beauty,  
But it's good ter eat instead;  
Oh, they's nothin' quite so green  
As er fresh young cabbage head.

"Timotheus says this is the only pome he ever writ what came aout even."

"What does he mean by that?" drawled Nate Burnham.

"Wal, he's thinkin' er one he writ on the big fair we had over ter the Centre. He started in this way:

" 'This is the biggest fair in taown;'



“There’s seven words ter that fust line, an’ he meant ter hev the same number in the next line, but the best he could do was twenty, fer do what he would, he couldn’t make it go with er word less, so it had ter read this way:

“‘This is the biggest fair in taown,  
An’ spite er what our neighbors  
say it’s nigh onter the biggest  
ever here, an’ will bring us great  
renaown.’

“They’s quite er difference between seven an’ twenty, but Timotheus says the poet’s steed is dif’kilt ter ride.

“‘Why don’t ye quit it?’ says I, an’ then Timotheus rolled his eyes up ter the ceilin’ an’ began ter gestickerlate, an’ talk ’baout the fire er genius an’ sich, till he fairly made me sick. Last night he was talkin’ ’baout the divine ’flatus! What on *airth* d’ye s’pose that is?’

“Ain’t it some kind er belluses ter blow things up with?” questioned Nate Burnham, but Joel could not say.



“It’s suthin’ fine-soundin’ he heared tell of when he was aout West. I don’t b’lieve he knows what it means, but it saounds grand, so he keeps er sayin’ of it.”

Joel paused, thrust his hands deep into his pockets and looked about for sympathy. No one ventured a consoling remark; instead, they looked furtively at him to learn if he had anything further to say. He had.

“Timotheus thinks naow we ought ter hev er head man in this taown, mayor, or some such person, an’ he says he’d be willin’ ter fill the place whenever we want him.”

“Don’t lack conf’dence, does he?” said Nate Burnham.

“Nate sets behind that ’ere stove, summer an’ winter, like a Injun in a ambush, an’ fires his remarks regardless,” said Jerry Tileston, his crony.

“’Most allus hit the bull’s-eye, don’t I?” queried Nate.

“Wal, yes, ye do,” Jerry agreed.

“I guess with Squire Weston an’ Mr. Potts, an’ Lawyer Everton, an’ Parson



Spooner, an' Mr. Jenks ter keep things er goin', we kin git 'long without *Mayor* Timotheus Simpkins fer er spell, fer if them as I named happened ter run up agin er stump, Mis' Hodgkins will 'gree any time ter furnish 'em all the news, an' any 'mount er advice, free gratis."

They turned toward the open door to see who had made this speech, and saw Jabez Brimblecom, who had just entered. Shouts of laughter greeted his appearance.

"I heard ye, an' I couldn't help speakin' aout, but here's suthin' that'll make ye laugh. I do'no's ye kin und'stand it. I vum I can't," and as he spoke he unfolded a letter and appeared to be searching for some line or paragraph which he wished to read. His face was puckered into a comical frown; evidently the writing was not very legible. Suddenly a smile overspread his genial face.

"Here 'tis," he said, "an' 'tis the same hifalutin' stuff that Sabriny's husband allus writes. He must keep the dictionary under his elbow all the time whilst he's er writin'.



I don't b'lieve he knows all the big words he uses, er what the meanin' of 'em is. I'll be switched ef I kin make head er tail ter his letters when he gits goin'. Naow listen ter this:

“ ‘Sabriny, as ye remember, is allus stylish, an' she looks a-dorable in a new gaown she calls er dinner-gaown. Its made er——’ Naow, that's what I can't make out. Muslin de swow? Could that be it? Ef it is, what in time *is* the stuff that Sabriny's gaown is made of? An' the next thing he says is this:

“ ‘Sabriny's drinkin' deep draughts er delight at the fountain er knowledge, havin' j'ined er club what meets ter study literatoor.' I've seen Sabriny drinkin' sody at er drug store, an' doin' it as ef she liked it, but Sabriny drinkin' sody an' Sabriny drinkin' knowledge is different. The sody went daown easy, but ef she *is* my cousin, I do say 't I sh'd think knowledge would stick by the way.”

“Jabez, ye're a case!” declared Nate Burnham.



“An’ so’s Sabriny, and that big-talkin’ husband er hern. But listen ter this, fer this beats the hull:

“‘On pleasant Sat’day afternoons we per-am-boo-late the parks which is numerous in this city, but aour evenings we spend in the exchange er intelectooal thoughts.’ Naow, is the exchange er place they go ter where idees can be borried, er does he mean that they two individooals spends their evenings er swapping thoughts? Ef *that* is it, I mus’ say I don’t see haow they do it, fer Sabriny ain’t got no idees ter spare, and the land knows hisn are kind er skimpy.”

The youth near the cracker barrel nibbled one and slipped another into his pocket, while Jerry Tileston was seized with a coughing spell, caused by having hastily swallowed a piece of dried apple. The others of the group joined in hilarious laughter.

They had heard many a wordy discourse delivered by Mr. C. Barnard Boardman, and they were well acquainted with his wife,



“Sabriny Brimblecom that was,” as they invariably called her. They knew the bombastic manner of the one and the extreme vanity of the other, and thus saw the droll points in the letter so extravagantly expressed.

Silas Barnes had been engaged in untangling the many kinks in a new clothesline and endeavoring to wind it neatly. When he had completed the task he hung the coil upon a convenient hook and turned toward the group, a whimsical smile curving his usually firm mouth.

“I was thinkin’,” he said, “while Jabez was er readin’ that ’ere letter, what er tremenjous lot er fun them two critters git aout er nothin’. He thinks he’s ’baout the biggest man alive, while Sabriny feels sure she’s the biggest toad in the puddle. Naow, that’s what I calls contentment. It don’t make no odds that they isn’t nigh as big as they feel; they *think* they is, an’ the question is, ain’t they ’baout as happy? I declare, Boardman seems ter be on tiptoe with satisfaction all



the time, while Sabriny only questions which is the most important er the two."

"They's what I calls er conceited couple," said Nate Burnham.

"An' I'll tell ye er pair wha' just their opposite," said Sandy McLeod, who thus far had maintained silence, while listening attentively to the comments of his neighbors.

"Who? Which? Do we know 'em?" questioned one and all.

"'Tis Clement Carlton an' his wife I'm speakin' o', an' a braw couple they be," said Sandy, "lovin' an' true tae each ither, an' generous an' kind tae their friends. Is't nae true?"

"Every word, Sandy, an' that we'll all agree to," rejoined Silas Barnes.

"Miranda Carlton is as fine a woman as ye'd find, look the whole world o'er, an' the lass, Randy, is as sweet as the gude woman we're talkin' aboot. Look at her love for wee Prue, that brought her hame wi' a rush tae learn if the winsome lassie were safe. I tell ye there's nae lass i' the village sae be-



loved as Randy," continued Sandy, to which Nate Burnham responded :

"An' it's every one'll agree with ye, Sandy, even ter Arthur Earnshaw, an' Jotham Potts, ter say nothin' er Aunt Nabby Ware's nephew what's visitin' here."

"Makes me laugh ter see his antics," chuckled Jerry Tileston; "fer ef ever I see er gawky spec'men, it's that young Caleb Ware. Aunt Nabby thinks he's some pun-kins, an' she's givin' aout word that her prop'ty'll be divided even between Agatha an' Caleb. Naow his head's full er the notion that he's one er Aunt Nabby's heirs-ter-be; he's runnin' raound the taown er doin' his best ter make himself ridic'lous."

"An' succeedin'," chuckled Nate.



## CHAPTER XIII

### RIVALS

“How blithe ye air, my bairnie,” Sandy McLeod called cheerily, at the same time turning in his saddle to smile at Prue, who sat upon the door-stone. She had been singing a merry song, and her clear, childish treble had attracted the old Scotchman, who dearly loved children and who often declared that their voices made the sweetest music in the world.

“I’m coming down to your house to sing to you and Mrs. Sandy,” said Prue, who could never be induced to call her Mrs. McLeod.

“They’re Sandy and Mrs. Sandy,” she was wont to say; “that’s their nicest names, an’ that’s why I call ’em so.”

“I’ll be hame in a wee, short time, an’ ye shall ride upon Heather’s back, while I lead



her," said Sandy, and Prue promised to wait upon the door-stone until he should return and carry her in state to his home.

She watched until Sandy and Heather were out of sight, then she looked about her for something amusing. There were not many things which a little girl could do with one hand, and the other was still in a sling.

"There's the kitten," she said, "but I can't catch her with one hand, and I can't dress my doll 'less I have both. Why don't the Buffums come over to play with me while everybody in my house is too busy to amuse me? P'raps if I sit still, and keep looking down the road, 'fore I know it somebody'll be coming 'long."

She looked toward the bend of the road where Sandy had turned to wave his cap to her, and——was that someone hurrying toward the house? It must be someone walking at a rapid gait, but the branches of the trees hung sufficiently low to obscure the figure. Ah, now he was nearer, and there



was no doubt as to his identity. Prue's eager smile changed to an expression of marked discontent.

"Nobody but Caleb Ware, an' I thought it *might* be Johnny Buffum," she said.

The young man walked with the confident step of one who believed implicitly in himself, and the smile upon his vapid countenance betokened his assurance that an enthusiastic welcome awaited him wherever he might go.

"Good-morning, good-morning, Miss Prue," he said, his thin, piping voice reminding one of a Java sparrow.

"Good-morning," Prue replied; "and it *is* a good morning, but I *do* wish you wouldn't call me Miss Prue; that you *please* wouldn't," she corrected, lest her speech might have sounded blunt; "fer Aunt Prudence is *Miss* Prudence, and folks *might* get us mixed."

Caleb promised to remember, but laughed at the idea of confusing Aunt Prudence with little Prue.



Prue, unaware that she had said anything droll, looked up at him with disapproving eyes.

“Is your sister at home?” Caleb asked.

“Yes; she’s helping ma and Philury,” Prue replied.

“I’m sorry she’s busy, but p’raps she’d drap everything and come aout ef she knew who’d come ter see her.”

“I don’t know,” said Prue, with provoking candor; “my Randy has some *very* nice boys what comes to see her. Arthur Earnshaw’s come home, and he ’n’ Eunice is always comin’ up here, an’ Jotham Potts is the very *nicest* boy I know, an’ I like him, ’cause he likes me ’*most* as much as he does Randy.”

“Why d’ye call them chaps boys? They’re as old as I be, ’n’ I’m twenty,” said Caleb, in a tone which, for some reason, annoyed Prue.

“Well, I call you ’*nother* boy. Your tall, shiny hat don’t make any diff’ence to *me*,” she said, with fine scorn.



"Will ye tell Randy I've arriv?" questioned Caleb, tartly.

Really, Prue was exasperating.

"Yes, I'll tell her," Prue said, with an air of having just learned Caleb's wishes; "I'd asked her 'fore, if you'd told me to." She ran into the house, shouting, with fine disregard for ceremony:

"Randy! Ran—dy! Here's Caleb Ware, an' he's out in the dooryard an' wants you to come and look at him!"

Questioned later as to why she had spoken thus, she looked up in mild surprise.

"Why, that's just what he said. He said if Randy knew who's come she'd drop everything to come out and see him; so I just hollered to ask her to come and look at him, an' she did, didn't she?"

Truly it was idle to question Prue. She ran out to announce that Randy would see Caleb, and at that moment espied Sandy McLeod at the gate.

"I'm coming! I'm coming!" she called, and ran down the path to meet him. Heather



turned her head to look at the little girl, and Sandy, with due care for the injured arm, swung her up into the saddle. Ah, it was fine to ride upon the back of the beautiful Heather! How daintily she stepped, sometimes turning her head toward Sandy, whom she loved and who held the bridle.

"She walks as if she's 'fraid she'd spill me off," said Prue.

"Ay, that she does," rejoined Sandy. "She does step wi' great care whene'er a bairnie is in the saddle."

"Caleb Ware is up to my house," said Prue, irrelevantly.

"I cannae abide that chap," said Sandy, under his breath.

"I think he's some homely, don't you?" asked Prue; "his face is kind er speckly and his hair is just the color of the hay in our barn."

"Oh, ye wee lassie! But ye've described him," said Sandy.

Prue was always a welcome visitor at the McLeod house, and Sandy knew that Mar-



garet would be delighted that he had brought the little girl home with him. Prue ran in at the open door and clambered up into the huge carved chair, which she always declared to be the counterpart of the throne chairs described in her book of fairy tales.

Margaret McLeod was ready and willing to tell the story which she knew her little guest expected, but she waited for the invitation which she knew would be forthcoming. Prue swung her little slippered feet and waited to see if "Mrs. Sandy" would begin.

"Will you please, just please, dear Mrs. Sandy, tell me a story 'bout when you were a little girl, no, a wee lassie, in bonnie Scotland?"

"Ah, bless ye, yes, I'll tell ye a tale o' Scotland since it always gies ye pleasure."

And while Prue was enraptured with the delightful stories which Margaret McLeod quaintly told, Randy was an enforced listener to a flattering description of himself which Caleb Ware was giving.



Caleb was very happy, because he always enjoyed hearing himself talk, and he considered that he was speaking of an interesting subject.

“Naow, I’m er pooty nice sort er chap, bein’s I’m straight as er string, belong ter er good fam’ly, gen’rous ter er fault, an’ I’m ter hev the prop’ty ter be gen’rous with.”

Randy smiled, and Caleb thought that encouraging. It did not occur to him that possibly she was amused.

“I do’no’s ye know it, but I’m ter hev half er Aunt Nabby Ware’s prop’ty, an’ that’s sartin, fer she’s made her will so. That’s pooty middlin’ sure, ain’t it?”

“I don’t think it’s nice to be making calculations upon the property while Aunt Nabby is living,” Randy ventured. She knew that Caleb possessed a lively temper, yet, at the risk of vexing him, she spoke. It seemed to her that it certainly denoted a lack of feeling to boast of the fortune which Aunt Nabby would leave to him. She wondered if Caleb would be able to



wait patiently for his anticipated wealth. Mrs. Ware was not old. It might be many years before a penny of her fortune would be in her nephew's grasping hands.

"I don't call it cal'latin' when it's as good as mine now."

Randy made no reply; she had not changed her opinion.

"An', any way, Miss Randy, I ain't yet spoke er the arrant what brung me here. They's to be the Harvest Fest'val in the leetle hall daown ter the Centre, an' will ye honor me with yer comp'ny? I'd be some pleased ter be yer escort."

Caleb made the little speech in a manner which told Randy that he felt that he was conferring a very great favor.

"Thank you," she said, "but I have already accepted an invitation for the Festival."

"S'pose I kin guess who 'tis 'ithout tryin' very hard," Caleb replied, his voice betraying his irritation; "it's sure ter be Jotham ye're goin' with; he's allus on hand



ter ax ye 'fore the rest of us kin ketch our breath."

"Jotham has gone to Boston on a business trip for his father, and does not expect to return in time to attend the Festival."

Caleb became more inquisitive than before. He glanced at Randy, but decided not to question her as to who the happy youth might be. He was wild to know, but it was evident that Randy did not think it necessary to tell him.

He bade Randy a curt "Good-morning," and hurried down the road, a very different appearing youth from the one who, an hour before, had walked buoyantly up the path with the confident belief that his invitation would be accepted, that he would attend the Festival as the escort of the loveliest girl in the town.

Caleb was a natural blunderer, and his self-esteem caused him to do and say many things of which he would never have been guilty had he possessed less egotism and a bit of tact.



He was very angry, not with Randy, but with that lucky youth, whoever he might be, who had so early proffered his invitation.

Why had not Randy waited before accepting? She might have known that he would ask her to accompany him. Thus he argued as he hastened along, his annoyance increasing with every step. It was his habit to glance up at the houses which he passed to see if the occupants were casting admiring glances at him, but to-day his mind was so filled with the matter which vexed him that he looked neither to the right nor the left, and was unaware that anyone was approaching.

A tall, rugged-looking girl had turned the curve of the road, and with bright eyes fixed upon Caleb, was rapidly coming toward him. Her yellow hair was twisted into a tight knot below her hat, and her short skirt showed the resolute tread of feet in their stout, thick-soled shoes.

“Mornin’, Caleb; no, ’scuse me, *Mr.*



*Ware*," she corrected, as she espied the shining silk hat.

"Mornin', B'lindy, I mean Miss Babson," Caleb replied, mimicking her manner. Both laughed; she in good-natured amusement, he, because her merry laugh was contagious. There was a moment's pause before either spoke, and in that interval a bright idea flitted through Caleb's mind. He would invite Belinda; Randy need not imagine that it was difficult for him to secure a fair partner for the evening's pleasure.

"May I hev the pleasure er yer comp'ny at the Fest'val, Belindy?" he asked.

A quick flush of pleasure tinged the girl's cheek. Her red lips parted, and she was about to answer Caleb that she would be delighted to accompany him when Caleb, as usual, blundered.

"I wish ye'd let me take ye, B'lindy; 'twould tickle me tremenjous, bein's I axed Randy Weston fust, an' so's she's goin' with somebody else, why, I thought I'd ax the fust gal I seen, an' that's you."



Was there ever such a bungler? Belinda's cheery smile changed to an angry frown. An instant she glared at him.

"Well, Caleb Ware! So ye're givin' me er second-hand invitation, are ye? Let me tell ye, ye kin go to the Fest'val alone, fer all me, er p'raps ye kin find some girl that'll be pleased ter 'comp'ny ye, but it won't be *me!*"

She stamped her foot smartly as she uttered the last word, then turned abruptly and tramped up the road toward home, leaving the surprised and discomfited swain to wonder what had caused the outburst.

"What on *airth?*" muttered Caleb, as he stared at her receding figure. "What'd I do, I'd like to know? Thought she'd feel quite sot up ef I was willin' ter take her. Wal, girls is queer critters."

Belinda, becoming more and more angry with every foot of ground which she traversed, reached home in a state of fury. Jemima, in the doorway, saw her sister coming, and saw, too, at a glance, that some-





“Well, Caleb Ware! So ye’re givin’ me er second-hand invitation, are ye?” — *Page 232.*







thing had displeased her. She knew Belinda too well to question her. If she wished to know the cause of her anger, she would do well to maintain silence; if she asked a question, Belinda would refuse to answer, but if she let the matter pass apparently unnoticed, Belinda later would tell it in detail.

Randy, after Caleb had strode down the path, ran up to her room to look at the pretty gown which she intended to wear.

It was a simple white frock, its short sleeves and open neck giving it a pretty, youthful look. Randy had believed that she was to go with Eunice and Reuben Jenks, but Arthur, unexpectedly returning, was to be one of the party. She was arranging the ruffles which edged the neck, when from her window she heard the voice of Philury. She was talking with her cousin, who had called to see her, and, as usual, forcibly expressing her views.

“Naow, I tell ye, Arabella, ye needn’t talk Aunt Nabby Ware er her nephew ter



me. I say 't she ort ter leave the hull er her fort'n ter little Agatha. That 'ere Caleb's more'n I kin stand. He come er struttin' up here the fust thing this mornin' ter offer the gret pleasure er his comp'ny ter aour Randy fer the Fest'val daown ter the Centre. Pooty cool, wa'n't he? He was some s'prised that Randy didn't jump at the chance."

"Ain't he quite er fine chap?" questioned Arabella; "ain't he goin' ter be wuth consid'able?"

"He may, eventooally, git some cash f'm his aunt, but he's such er mean leetle spec'men that he ain't, personally, wuth er cent."

"Money talks," said Arabella.

"So does Caleb, but he ain't wuth listenin' ter," concluded Philury.

"Wal, Caleb an' Arthur an' Jotham is what they'll call rivals," Arabella remarked.

"They will, will they? Wal, what *they* say don't caount," was Philury's reply.



## CHAPTER XIV

### AT THE FESTIVAL

SUCH a perfect night for the Festival! The air was crisp, not cold, and overhead the stars shone out like twinkling eyes which laughed merrily at the jokes, the bright repartee, the laughter of the happy girls with their brave escorts, who tripped along toward the Centre.

“Such luck to have you with us, Randy,” Eunice was saying; “when we first talked of the Festival I said, ‘it may be enjoyable, but it would be twice as fine if Randy were to be here.’ ”

“And here I am,” Randy replied.

“And here you are,” said Arthur; “but say, Randy, what nonsense was Belinda Babson repeating? ”

Randy laughed as she said, “I was not listening to Belinda; what did she say? ”

“Oh, Arthur was vexed because she said



that he would see little of you during the evening; that she knew that you had agreed to be one of the girls at the flower-booth," Eunice said; "you aren't, are you? It's just Belinda's teasing."

"Indeed, I am to help them at the flower-booth," Randy replied, "so Belinda was not talking nonsense."

"Well, I call that disappointing," said Arthur; "just as Eunice and I were congratulating ourselves that we were to have you with us for the evening, we learn that you've been captured by the ladies in charge of arrangements for the annual sale and Festival."

Arthur's voice betrayed how deep was his annoyance.

"I call that scheming," he continued. "They knew that the flowers which Mrs. Gray contributed from her little greenhouse would be hard to dispose of, our neighbors being people who spend their funds for necessities rather than for hot-house blooms. They think, and wisely, too, that if you



stand behind the blossoms, Randy, many flowers will be purchased which otherwise would not tempt customers."

"But you won't have a fine time at all in that little place which they have reserved for the flower girls. I did so wish you to walk about with me," Eunice said.

Reuben Jenks had been walking beside Eunice, listening, but taking no part in the conversation. Now he spoke.

"I say, Arthur! Can't we manage to seize the good ladies who dragged Randy into this arrangement, confine them in one of the cloak-rooms until they agree to release Randy from her promise? But, all joking aside, Randy, I do think it was cheeky for them to ask you to spend your evening in that way! Why didn't they ask some of the girls from their own neighborhood?"

"I wasn't *dragged* into an agreement to assist them," Randy said, "and as to asking other girls to sell their flowers, they have invited three of the girls from the Centre,



so that there will be four of us. We shall not have to work very hard."

Arthur said no more about the matter. He felt annoyed that Randy should be thus monopolized for the evening, but he did not intend to make her uncomfortable. Since talking would not change the fact, he would speak of other things. Tactfully he turned Reuben's attention to another subject, and soon the little party was as merrily chatting as if nothing had occurred to ruffle its content.

Belinda Babson and her sister, Jemima, were not favorites with Arthur and Eunice, for the Earnshaws were gentle bred, while the Babsons, born of rude stock, expressed themselves at times in a manner which provoked and often offended their friends. Therefore, when hurrying footsteps seemed endeavoring to overtake the little party and a teasing voice called out:

"What d'ye think naow, Arthur? Did ye ask Randy? D'ye believe what I said?" Arthur was annoyed.



“Oh, B'lindy, come 'long an' tease me, ef ye must tease *somebody*; I don't mind as Arthur does,” Reuben said.

“That's the reason there's no fun teasin' ye, Reuben,” she cried.

“Ye're a master hand at it,” Reuben replied; “an' ye might use me ter practice on, ter keep yer hand in.”

“B'lindy don't need no practice,” Jemima remarked, with her usual sisterly tenderness, “fer she don't hes'tate ter speak aout ter me at any time er day.”

“Wal, ye flourish pretty well,” Belinda retorted, “ef ye do hev ter endure hearin' me speak my mind.”

Phoebe Small, with a young cousin who had been visiting her, Jack Marvin, with his cousin Dorothea, or Dot, as he persistently called her, together with a host of their young neighbors and friends, now joined them, and the Babson girls forgot their little quarrel in the eager rush to reach the hall.

The residents at the Centre were very



proud of their hall. It was not spacious, it could not boast gas or electric lights, but it was the largest hall in the county, and if its lighting was accomplished by resorting to lamps, they were larger and more numerous than in any of the county's other public buildings. No effort had been spared which could enhance the festive appearance of the hall. Evergreen was twined around the pillars, every doorway, every window-frame, was wreathed with it; festoons hung along the walls, and at the head of the hall the flower-booth showed naught of the framework which formed it, evergreen hiding every post and crossbeam from sight.

Great branches of scarlet maple blazed in the full glory of their autumn coloring, while at intervals the festoons of evergreen were held in place with a strong twine which fastened a huge bouquet of golden marigolds.

As the party entered they received a jolly welcome from those who had already arrived.



“Think of the fun we’ll have this evening,” said a pretty, dark-eyed girl. “Mrs. Gray’s flowers were late in arriving, and the flower-booth won’t be opened until all the blossoms are arranged and ready for sale. They’re sorting them now, but we’ll have time to walk around and meet the other girls before they’ll want us. Come! There’s some girls we know just coming in.”

She hastened toward the door to greet her friends, and Randy with Arthur and Eunice with Reuben Jenks commenced a tour of the hall, admiring the decorations and listening to the music which the local band was discoursing.

Jack Marvin had found a congenial friend, a girl who once had been his class-mate, while Dot, never fond of walking, was easily persuaded to remain near the band with one of Jack’s chums for a companion.

Dorothea’s figure was conspicuously stout, and she often begged her cousin to refrain from calling her “Dot,” because, she said, “a dot is *small* and round, and I



am *huge* and round, and you just make people look at me when you call me Dot."

"Let 'em look," drawled Jack, but Dorothea would not agree.

"I don't mind their looking," she said, "if they ain't *made* to look by hearing that ridiculous name."

The hall was fast becoming crowded, when Sandy McLeod, pushing his way through the mass which blocked the doorway, called out in bluff good-humor:

"Hoot, lads an' lassies! Will ye nae let me in? An' havin' done that, will ye nae permit the ladies wi' me tae enter the bower ye made? "

"Ay, Sandy, that we will," they cried. He laughed with delight because of their hearty greeting, and, followed by Margaret and Janie, he made his way toward the head of the hall. None of those assembled knew the programme which had been arranged save those who had been invited to take part.

It was but a few moments after Sandy



had entered the hall that Janie disappeared behind a heavy red curtain which hung beside the flower-booth. The large window of the booth was also curtained, and the young people were very anxious as to what these curtains concealed. Someone asked where Janie could be found, and just at that moment Arthur turned to speak to Randy and found that she had vanished.

A voice making an announcement claimed their attention. After a brief speech of welcome, he said :

“ We will now listen to a solo which was written especially for this occasion, and which will be sung by Janie McLeod.”

Enthusiastic applause immediately followed the announcement, for Janie was a favorite, and a solo from her was always a treat. Her beautiful voice was being skillfully trained, and her teacher had told Sandy that in a few years Janie would make her debut in the city before audiences which would listen spellbound.

“ Which way shall we look for her? ”



"Have ye heard what she's ter sing?"

"S'pose she's behind that curtain?"

Such were the whispered questions, when the long red drapery was swept aside and Janie, radiant, smiling, stepped forth, bowing in acknowledgment of the renewed applause. Her flaxen braids gleamed in the light, her Scotch costume gave her piquant beauty a fine setting, and the bright smile which curved her lips told that she was eager to delight her audience with her singing.

Mrs. Gray, at the piano, which she had kindly loaned for the evening, played a brilliant little prelude, and then, with witching grace, Janie sang this song:

"Ladies fair and maidens sweet,  
List, with song your charms I greet;  
Stalwart men, brave youths and true,  
I've a word to say to you.

"None but brave deserve the fair,  
Would you win their tender care,  
Flowers bright and flowers sweet  
Lay as offerings at their feet.



“Wealth of brightest blooms are ours,  
And while speed the happy hours,  
Buy of us the flowers so bright,  
Here is where they’re shown to-night.”

As Janie sang the last line, she lifted her hand to direct attention toward the flower-booth, and as she did so the little curtains were drawn aside, and in the evergreen-wreathed window Randy smiled out upon the audience. Before her lay a mass of gorgeous blooms, and, as if in invitation, she extended her hands, which held a wealth of fragrant roses.

Cheer upon cheer echoed through the hall, and then the eager crowd pressed nearer to obtain a closer view of the lovely flower girl.

Her white frock was most becoming and formed a fine background for the mass of bright flowers. Mrs. Gray had fastened a white rose in Randy’s hair, and a slender vine encircled her head like a wreath.

Jane now appeared beside her, but Randy, even with her three assistants, found it a



task to serve all the patrons who crowded around the window. Truly, those who had planned this novel manner of introducing their flower sale had chosen wisely when they asked Janie and Randy to assist them. The little Scotch lassie's song had charmed every heart, while Randy, popular with all, proved irresistible as she smiled and offered her flowers.

Hands long accustomed to grasping every hard-earned penny now searched pocket after pocket for a possible stray coin with which to purchase a blossom from the "Squire's darter."

"I guess I'll hev ter hev er *bootonyere*, as they say in the city. Gimme as much as ye kin fer ten cents, an' put it in my button-hole, will ye, please?"

Randy looked at the eager face of the youth and decided that if the placing of the flowers added to their worth she would agree to do it for all customers.

Caleb Ware, rudely pushing his neighbors that he might reach Randy, squared his



shoulders, and, casting a supercilious glance toward the spender of the dime, loudly proclaimed his wishes.

“I want er big bo-kay fer my buttonhole, an’ I don’t *keer* what it costs,” he said, staring about him to see if his extravagance were making an impression.

“Choose what you wish,” she said.

Caleb glanced once more to be sure that he was observed, then selected a large red rose, three pinks, some mignonette, and a few ferns.

“I guess that’ll do,” he said; “tie ’em tergether. Haow much is the cost?”

“Forty cents,” said Randy. Then the crowd giggled, for Caleb, knowing nothing of the price of hot-house blooms, had thought that twenty cents would, doubtless, cover the expense. He stepped hastily aside, and opening his wallet commenced a frantic search for enough to meet the bill. After some minutes, during which the crowd, which despised Caleb’s pompous manner, made countless suggestions, he finally found



forty cents in nickels and numerous pennies. These he dropped into Randy's hand, and as she fastened the huge nosegay in place she heard him sigh. She could not determine whether the sigh betokened regret that she was not his fair lady for the evening, or if it indicated deep sorrow at parting with his forty cents; she believed that the latter was the cause of his grief.

A laughing, chattering group of girls came next. Each purchased a pink and ran away to join her friends. Phoebe Small came next.

"I've left ma over near the band," she said. "She thinks I've come just to talk to you, but I want some bright flowers for her. She says she can't afford them, but this is some money I've been saving, and I'm going to get some flowers for her, she loves them so."

Truly it was a different Phoebe from the one who used to think only of self. Randy made a charming cluster, and Phoebe hurried away in eager haste to witness her



mother's surprise and delight. A tall, gaunt woman came next.

"I'd like jest a few posies fer my sister. It's her birthday," she confided, "an' she's so fond of 'em. I'd like ter buy a heap, but I can't spare much money." Her eyes were wistful.

"Can I git er few fer ten cents? "

Randy bent toward her, a tender smile upon her lips.

"I'll make a lovely little bouquet for that," she said.

"That 'ere feller that bought of ye fust didn't git many," the woman said, doubtfully, yet with hope, as if Randy must have meant what she said.

"I gave him a red, a white, and a pink carnation," she said, "and you shall have more, for see, this rose in my hair is mine, and I'll give it to you. Then with some foliage you'll have a very sweet little bouquet."

"Ye're gen'rous, an' I thank ye," the woman said, an odd sensation in her throat



making it impossible for her to say more. The woman had seen little kindness, and less generosity, and Randy's gentle manner and the kindly act had moved her more than she would have cared to admit. At the moment the woman had been the only customer, and Randy had supposed herself unobserved, but Arthur and Eunice had seen Randy take the rose from her hair. He stepped forward so that the light fell upon his fair hair and handsome face.

"You were kind to that woman, a stranger," he said. "Randy, will you do as kind a thing for me?"

"If I can," she said, wondering what his request would be.

He at once selected the choicest roses, with mignonette to surround them. Randy supposing that they were for Eunice, arranged and tied them with infinite care. Arthur laid the price of the flowers upon the green moss upon which the blossoms were spread, then, looking up at Randy, he proffered his request.



“You gave your only rose to that poor woman because you delight in being kind. Will you accept these roses and wear them, Randy, for me?”

Randy hesitated. It was a conspicuous place in which to wear his flowers, and she well knew that many would notice them and be curious as to her motive, but Arthur stood waiting for her reply.

Eunice, silent, eager, looked pleadingly at her.

“For Eunice’s sake,” Randy whispered, and she fastened the fragrant blossoms with the clasp which held her bodice.

A group of girls were expressing their views regarding the arrangement of the Festival.

“I think this hall looks fine,” said one. “I like the red draperies with the evergreen, don’t you?”

“I don’t know but pink would have been prettier,” was the response.

“Oh, *pink*, with all that green!” exclaimed a third.



“Well, pink and green are pretty together. My! Look at that big buttonhole bouquet! Who *is* he?”

As Caleb strutted past the group he glanced toward them, to learn if they were observing him. He saw that they were, and his spirits rose, buoyed by the balm to his vanity. He sauntered toward a corner where several youths whom he knew were conversing.

“Hello, Caleb! Some weight ter that bokay, ain’t they?” said one.

“Got much left ter treat the girls with?” asked another.

“Oh, keep still, can’t ye?” retorted Caleb; “I want ter hear the band.”

“Hear ’em! With all the racket they’re makin’? I shouldn’t think ye’d hev ter make er effort ter listen. Jim Jessop is blowin’ that brass horn fit ter split, and the way Zachary Grafton is beatin’ that ’ere drum he’ll whack the head off’n it before ye kin say ‘Jumpin’ Jupiter,’” was the reply.



“Wal, it’s the kind er music I like,” Caleb responded, “fer ye kin hear it all parts er the haouse, an’ it’s so laoud ye seem ter be gittin’ yer money’s wuth.”

“Lan’, Caleb! But ye’re merc’nary!” continued the teasing youth; “we had ter pay ten cents admission ter git in here, an’ the band’s firin’ all that music at us! By the way ye talk, ef ye’d paid er dollar ter git in ye’d think ye was cheated ’nless the band could bang laoud ’nough ter make ye deaf!”

The local band had many admirers, and as it was the only one in the county, it was sure of an engagement whenever and wherever music was required. Its leader possessed no greater knowledge of music than did any one of the members. The blacksmith, who played a huge wind instrument, had been rated musical director, but he directed only when a dispute arose. If one played rapidly, and another slowly, and a wordy battle ensued, the blacksmith arose in his might.



"You two fellers quit talkin' an' go on blowin' them horns," he would say, and they would immediately obey.

The Festival was voted a success. Those who had been present as visitors said so; the flower-booth had netted a generous sum, the refreshment tables had been well patronized, and the managers, when they counted the proceeds, were jubilant.

Just before closing time Jotham entered the hall, having returned from his business trip earlier than he had believed possible, and thus was one of the merry party as it turned homeward. All were gay and light-hearted, although Arthur, who liked Jotham and admitted his good qualities, could not be enthusiastic over his return. He resolved to make the best of it, however, and endeavored to be an agreeable member of the party.

The next morning Philury begged for a description of the Festival, declaring that "ter hear Randy tell 'baout it was the next thing to havin' been there."



“That’s jest what *I* say,” argued Prue.  
“Now, Randy, you begin.”

Randy gave her two eager listeners a detailed account of the decorations, the flowers, the feast at the refreshment tables, and the little happenings which had contributed to the evening’s pleasure.

“That’s great,” Philury said; “ef I’d er been there, *I’d* er sung fer ’em. Not that I’m much of er singer, but my voice is paow-erful; I guess ye could er heared me over that band ef I’d done my best!”

“If I’d been there,” said Prue, “*somebody* would have treated *me* to ice cream, an’ I guess it would have been Jotham. He ’most always does treat, ’n’ Arthur Earnshaw doesn’t; I like Jotham best; don’t you, Randy?”

“They’re both pleasant friends,” Randy replied.

“An’ there’s Caleb Ware. D’ you like him, Randy?”

“He is Aunt Nabby Ware’s nephew; we must be kind to him,” was the gentle an-



swer; but Prue was not satisfied, and she turned to Philury as she said:

“ I *do wish* I knew which Randy plefers.”

There were many who shared Prue's curiosity, and those who have learned to love Randy, and would like to learn the answer to Prue's question, may do so in

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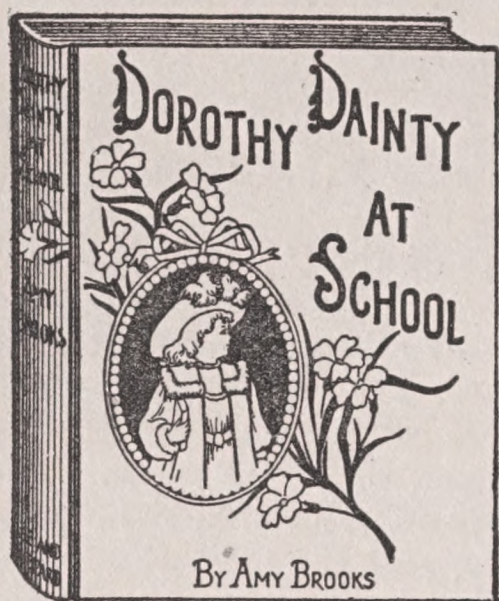
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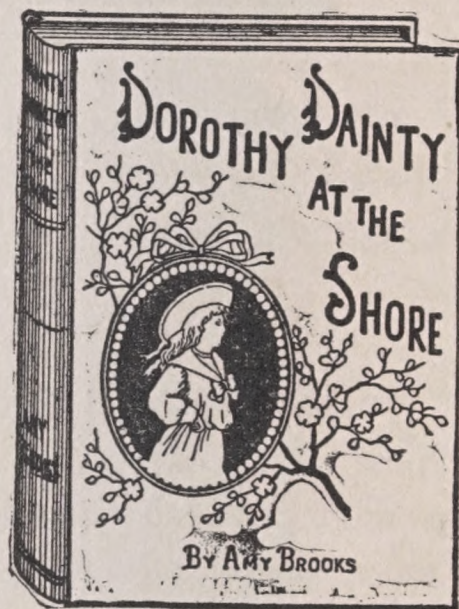
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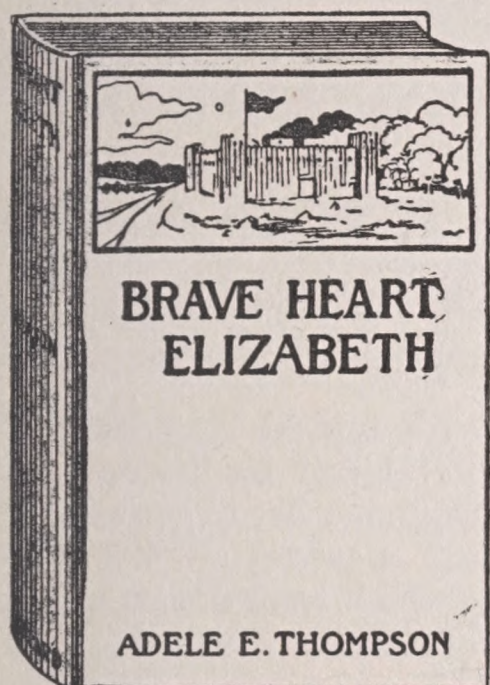
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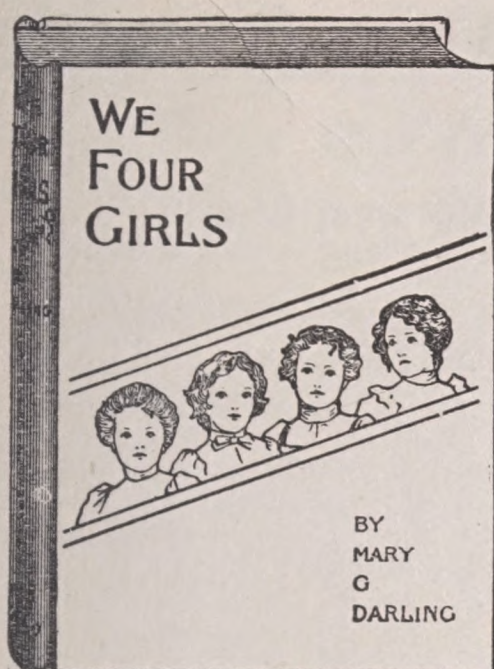
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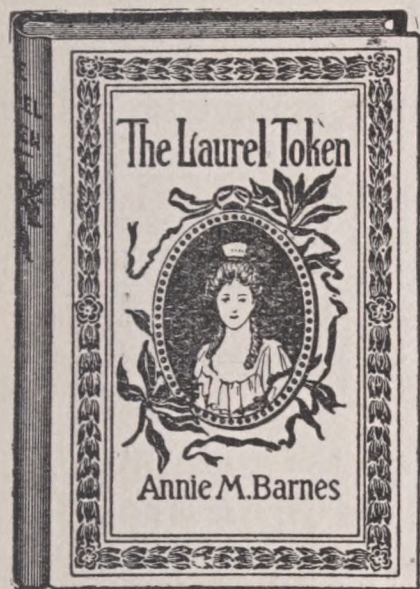


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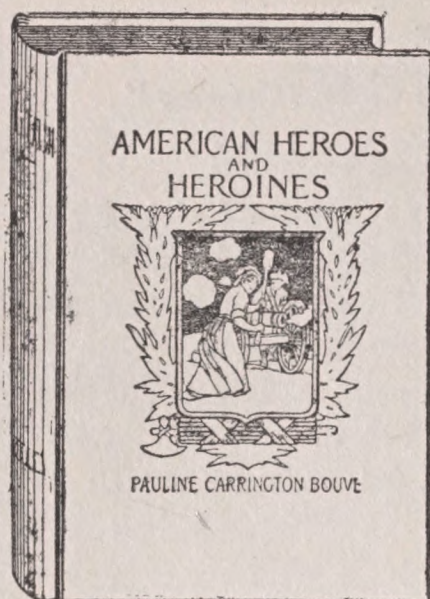


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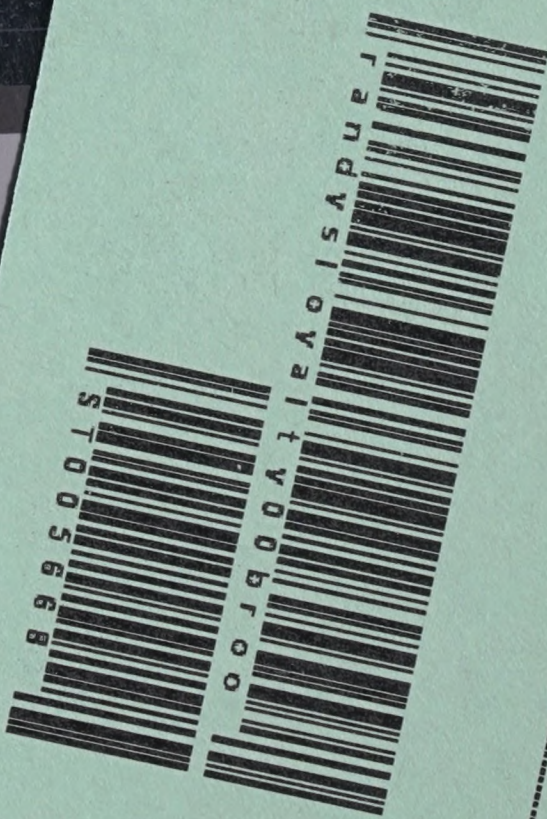




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